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EMBERS

JEFFREY DEPREND

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E. Kathryn Schaff

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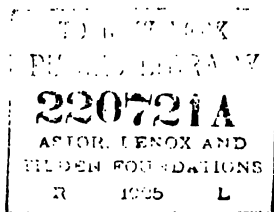
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E M B E R S

JEFFREY DEPREND

EMBERS

CHAPTER ONE.

The highway from the field to the homestead stretched out like a giant snake, hidden in patches by undulating slopes of green and yellow.

The distance was, perhaps, a mile.

The youth, who had spent the day a-field, trudged wearily homeward behind the team.

In the meadows grasshoppers sang drowsily.

From the river hard by the shrill piping of frogs broke in upon the quiet serenity of the scene.

Along the way the eglanterre ran riot, overburdened with laughing bloom, filling the air with the perfume of simplicity and the sweet mysticism of the earth.

The dust lay thick upon the road.

Cat-birds mewed sadly in the haw trees.

Arriving upon an elevation in the road, the youth halted and looked back.

Leaning heavily against the flank of Rob, his favorite horse, he drew a long, deep breath which was more like the heaving of a sigh, and mopped his neck.

He gazed back into the valley below, where lay the field fresh ploughed in the green framework of unbroken ground; the rich, dark fallow formed a picture of promise vague and dim.

"Done!" exclaimed the youth aloud.

The faint murmur of a bell came to him.

He started.

"Hurry on, old fellows!" said he to the patient beasts; and they, understanding, pricked up their ears and started off.

Maurice was tall for his fifteen years and none too stoutly built.

His eyes were blue and the skin, though freckled, white.

The hair, long and rebellious, curled clumsily around the ears.

After the fashion of country youths, he stooped perceptibly in his walk, which was a long, awkward stride.

His well made hands were cramped and the palms calloused from contact with the handles of the plow.

The finger nails were chipped and black with the loam of the field.

Before him lay another valley; and on the summit of the wide plateau beyond, clearly outlined against the purpling sky, stood the gabled homestead of the Rodrays, who were his people.

The house was of pretentious proportions.

It was of red brick, with green shutters and white trimmings, and stood on the crest of the plateau, some five hundred feet back of the highway.

Four gables pointed each to a different corner of the earth.

The land about the place spoke well for the thrift of the owner.

In the rear of the house, an apple orchard, covering, perhaps, five acres of land, was in bloom. Flanking this was a ten-acre field in corn and potatoes. On the far side of the orchard was the family garden, in which, the elder Rodray not infrequently boasted, every vegetable known to the clime was to be found.

There were plum and cherry trees around the entire edge of the garden, and between these and the fence grew currant and gooseberry bushes in profusion.

At a distance of some eight hundred feet from the house rose the barns, the sheep-pens and the stables, between which and the house lay a straight, well-beaten path.

The Rodrays were, perhaps, the best-known family in the surrounding country.

William, the father, had come into the north country and settled close to the American frontier when he was yet a young man and the land virgin forest and unbroken soil.

One by one came sturdy pioneers to the spot chosen by William Rodray.

The woodsman's axe and the stump fires were soon at work in their destructive mission.

Gradually clearings were made; and in the open spaces humble cabins appeared where white-winged tents had stood.

The soil was rich and fertile; the yield of crops abundant.

The straggling cabins in time became a street.

The hamlet grew and gave itself a name—Lasalle.

And as the hamlet of Lasalle grew in wealth, in prestige and importance, so did some of its people.

And not the least among these was William Rodray.

At the time of his advent in the field of his future activities, William Rodray was a slim, stern-looking youth.

His possessions, besides the thin, frayed clothes on his back, consisted of a red kerchief, full of stale crackers and cheese, and an extra pair of cheap cotton socks which he had washed and dried by the side of streams on his way through the strange country.

A few shillings, securely tied in a corner of the red kerchief, totaled the sum of his meager fortune.

Years of monotonous sameness in his diet, consisting mainly of potatoes, had imparted to his features a starchy pallor.

A native of the North of Ireland, his boyhood had known no more elevating element than the fogs and the bogs of that wretched island.

It was with a sense of great animal joy that he first drank in the hot, clear sunshine, the

cool delicious night breezes of the Canadian land.

The sound of the axe in the maple, the crackling of the smudge fires, the yelps of the wolf-pack, the distant rumbling of the raging cataract, a mile away, burst in upon his numb and dreamless soul like the intonation of a mighty song.

He took a wife.

On the frontier, in those days, beauty was by no means an essential in the choosing of a helpmate. If a maid was strong and buxom, had a wholesome fear of the Lord and was trained in the spinning of wool and the cooking of common fare, the lad was fortunate, indeed, who came to possess her.

If, for good measure, the lass happened to be endowed with rosy cheeks, sweet lips and laughing eyes, with small feet, a full breast and well-rounded hips, so much the better for the bridegroom.

But these were luxuries—qualities that might not be given to all, and which men would be foolish to seek with persistence, lest the men go unwedded and the work undone.

A large family was born of the union—

twelve in all. Seven died in early childhood. Of the remaining five, three were girls—Ann, Mary and Alice. Maurice and George were the only sons of the family.

If prosperity had attended the struggles of the emigrant youth in the gathering of wealth, the same might not be said of his efforts to control and direct the members of his household.

For this there were varying reasons.

Mrs. Rodray was one of those storm-tossed souls which the Fates seem to have singled out as especial objects of injustice and persecution.

The elder Rodrays had each a well-defined system of education which they sought, at every opportunity, to impress upon the minds of the children.

The father held his spouse in open contempt for the benefit of the younger members of the household, while the wife employed every means at her command to instill in the hearts of her offspring the same hatred and fear, which she felt for her lord.

Thus, and among such surroundings, had the young Rodrays grown to where they could judge for themselves.

There were factions.

There were loud, bitter quarrels, in which both elements took sides.

The scenes usually occurred at the table.

The mother, who not infrequently brought on the trouble herself, would finally settle down into a whimpering drizzle of tears.

This was too much for the man's temper.

He would spring from his seat with an oath and hurl himself out of the room.

And now the mother, recovering her equanimity, would despatch Alice to the cellar for compotes and other delicacies which were kept out of sight of the father.

Regaling the spirit with the body, she would now go over, between bites, the oft-repeated story of her injured love and the countless wrongs which she had suffered at the hands of William Rodray.

The children never grew tired of this story.

They licked their chops upon its recital.

It added zest to the monotony of their little lives.

It imparted a delectable flavor to the plain brown gravy on their potatoes.

Too, it gave them a certain standing in the household.

For, were they not appealed to as judges?

On the other hand, if one of them had trouble with the mother, he or she was assured immunity by going straightway to the father and laying the case before him.

"Away with you," he would say, "your mother is a fool!"

And the child would take to its heels, knowing the case was won.

Alice, the younger daughter, had prepared the evening meal.

She was bringing in steaming bowls of soup and plates laden with hot biscuits.

A joint of boiled beef came next and took up its place in the center of the table; then followed in turn deep dishes of turnips, carrots and potatoes.

The girl, a comely maid of fourteen, now went to the kitchen door and rang the supper bell.

Then she ran over to the wooden bench in the corner of the kitchen and, dipping out water into an earthenware basin, bathed her face and neck.

The dining-room was of generous proportions.

Three large windows gave light and air to the apartment.

The room was substantially furnished.

A red and yellow rag carpet covered the floor.

A sideboard of black walnut stood solemnly in one corner; in another, a box-like stand, with a flat top, made by Maurice, to answer the purpose of a serving-table.

On the walls hung pictures in frames made of cones and acorns. The windows were curtained with long strips of white chintz.

The air was laden with the odor of lilacs, which were now a mass of purple and white bloom in the open windows.

There was a peculiar, though indefinable, lack of cheerfulness about the room.

The bloom-laden trees in the windows gave a distinct relief to the senses, while the vista beyond rolled away in interminable folds of green and gold.

The father was first to enter the dining-room.

He was a man of fifty years, or thereabouts.

There were heavy lines in the face of the man, wrought into the image by a long-waged

battle against penury in early life, no less than by the never-ceasing struggle to maintain the mastery of his household.

He walked with a thud of the heel and a pronounced, from side to side, jerk of the head.

His face was not unkindly, but hardened by the lines.

He looked neither to right nor left upon entering the room; but walked to his seat at the head of the table, his head hanging in thought.

And now doors opened on both sides of the room and the members of the household came in hastily, as in apology for the slight delay, and took their places at the table.

The father cast a swift glance about the room.

"Where is Maurice?" he asked.

"I just saw him coming over the hill with his team; he must have wanted to finish the oat field to-day."

The speaker was Alice, who always took it upon herself to shield her elder brother from the ire of the father.

It was a serious infraction of the rules of the household, as laid down by William Rodray, for a meal to be served without all of the family being at table.

Upon this occasion, however, the explanation carried its own excuse, for the father made no reply, but busied himself breaking thick slices of bread into his soup.

At the farther end of the table sat Mrs. Rodray, a small, black-haired woman, with pale skin and dark brown eyes.

Her mouth was small and thin-lipped and her mien was that of one who had suffered much for the sweet pleasure of innocent martyrdom.

One might easily imagine her with a halo of light about her head, leaving her saint's niche in the facade of some ancient cathedral and bearing the green palm of her earthly triumphs before the great throne.

On either side of the table sat the other members of the family.

Ann, the first-born, was to be married, within a few weeks, to a traveling auctioneer from Quebec.

The couple had spent but a few days in each other's company. But the man, a shabby appearing fellow of forty-odd years, was anxious to settle down in a "home of his own," while Ann, on the other side, who was but eighteen,

had been reading much, of late, of love and romance, wherein gallant knights and voluptuous ladies played wondrous parts.

She burned with great fire and waked long vigils, hoping that some one might come dashing into her chamber, to whom she might say: "Take me, my lord—I am yours now and forever!"

The proposal of the stranger had been greedily accepted by the parents, insomuch as it would mean one less to feed and clothe, but more especially, perhaps, for the reason that Ann was a girl; and a daughter married and packed off to bed with her husband—that would be a load off their minds, to be sure.

Mary, a timid, sweet-faced maid of seventeen, was leaving within a few days for the convent of the Hotel Dieu, where she was to take the veil of the sisterhood. The arrangement had not pleased the parents as well as would have done a suitable alliance.

There were a number of reasons for this, the foremost being that there was ever a possibility of Mary leaving the cloister and returning home, in which case it would be next to impossible to marry her off, as the men had a superstitious awe of an ex-nun.

In such an event, it would devolve upon the elder Rodrays to resume the burden of her maintenance.

These were things to be considered before the leap was made.

It would be too late afterwards.

And then, the disgrace, if it should happen!

But, Mary had made up her mind—she was going.

So, the family fell into reluctant silence and prepared for the departure of the young postulant.


Alice was a year out of school and was receiving attentions from a number of lads on neighboring farms.

None might boast, however, that he received more favor than any of his rivals from the youngest daughter of the Rodrays.

Fresh and winsome, she seemed to possess none of the sterner qualities of the father, nor the lachrymose vindictiveness of the mother.

She was the housekeeper since the mother had capitulated to her beloved rheumatism.

"You'll make a fair cook, Alice, for some good farmer lad with three or four hundred acres," the father would say, when in his best mood.



At this Mrs. Rodray would give a slight start as though pricked with a pin. Then her head shook slowly from side to side and her little brown eyes sought heaven in mute appeal.

She was thinking of herself and the work that would still remain to be done when the last of the girls had gone.

For William, the father, would never consent to her having a servant about the house—this she knew well.

George, the youngest son, was still in school.

He was a great “mother’s boy” and never failed to make capital of his caresses.

He generally knew some story which none of the other children had heard, wherein the elder Rodray had done or said this or that.

Or, perhaps, he had given this kind of a look or that kind of a look.

The mother, ever anxious to hear of something detrimental to her spouse, never stopped for a moment to sound these tales, which were overdrawn, or, more frequently, without basis of truth; but swallowed them whole.

Then she would grow excited and vitriolic in her denunciation of the father to the children.

Little had been said during the meal, as the

elder Rodray did not permit conversation among the younger members of the family.

Besides the sound of the iron forks upon the plates and the cautious sipping of hot soup, the room was in silence.

The father had finished his supper and was preparing to rise when Maurice entered the room.

The dark hair about his face and neck was still wet and clinging from hasty ablutions in the family basin. The collar of his flannel shirt was open and the sleeves rolled up to the elbows.

In the "V" on his chest, described by the lines of his open shirt, the cord of his scapular could be seen.

He closed the door behind him and walked to his seat at the table without speaking.

Alice rose to fetch his supper from the oven, where she had put it to keep warm.

"Why so late?" the father demanded, looking up at Maurice.

"I wanted to finish the oat field to-day."

And then:

"It will give me more time to attend the mission, and Father Nadeau told me this afternoon that it will begin a week from tomorrow."

"I don't know," replied the father, "that Jesuits' missions and the science of agriculture have anything in common. But I do know, and this much I can tell Father Nadeau, that in one instance, at least, the fields come first—and that's with William Rodray. A fine time for a mission—save souls and let the earth care for itself. Yes, let the devil do the ploughing—in May—when not a moment can be lost. A pretty kiddle of fish! If I had gone to church every time the bell rang, I'd be in the poorhouse to-day. Missions, novenas, triduums, the devil!"

"Oh, you wicked man!" broke in Mrs. Rodray, clasping her thin, white hands and looking up at the grey ceiling. "God will surely punish you!"

Turning upon the woman, the elder Rodray gave her a look of infinite scorn and, laughing outright in her face, "You lypocrite!" said he, and slammed the door behind him.

CHAPTER TWO.

Sanglow, the parish seat, was astir.

It was the first day of the mission.

It was to be no ordinary affair, this mission, preached by four able orators.

It had been promised Sanglow for years.

But not until now had Father Nadeau finally called the flock together for the purpose of moral regeneration.

True, the parish priest delivered his Sunday sermon as regularly as the day came around.

But that was different.

One grew accustomed to one's vicar or abbé and, in many instances, knew beforehand what he was going to say.

Of course, when things reached such a condition as this, the life spiritual of the parishioners turned sadly monotonous.

Little wonder there was lack of attendance, and snoring in church, and other lapses equally serious in the matter of Christian performance.

But the great day was here.

For three acres on either side of the church the broad avenues were lined with carriages and vehicles of many descriptions.

Farmers and villagers were grouped together in great numbers in front of the church, where they chatted, awaiting the last bell to enter.

The women, for the most part, had gone in, in their eagerness to catch a first glimpse of the missionaries.

Now and then a belated carriage drove up and discharged its occupants, then rolled away to a shed or a shady tree at the far end of the long, black line.

Through the open doors of the edifice the great white altar might be seen.

It was resplendent in the light of many flames.

The country folk had brought flowers out of their gardens and they, too, were heaped upon the background of the altar, without much show of taste, as by the hands of children.

The bell sobbed the last call to the faithful.

Men threw away their tobacco and hastily brushed their clothing with their hands.

All talking ceased in the press of the crowd.

A moment later the doors of the church were closed.

Within, the edifice was packed to the doors.

Some of the worshippers had come many miles to attend the opening ceremonies of the mission.

Those there were who had journeyed from neighboring parishes to hear the "Black Fathers."

The Jesuits were looked upon by a great many of these simple folk with a feeling akin to dread mingled with deep reverence.

The atmosphere of the church was stifling.

The celebrants moved about in a haze of incense.

Through the tall gothic windows, entirely too high for purposes of ventilation, the breathless heat streamed down upon the sweltering faithful. During the long-drawn-out "Veni Creator," two women and a child fainted and were carried out through the side door into the shade of trees.

Ushers tiptoed, like ghosts, mopping their necks and faces with sweat-drenched kerchiefs.

Presently, a black-robed figure appeared in the door of the sacristy.

Moving over to the foot of the altar, the priest knelt for a moment, his head inclined.

And now he rose and followed the crucifer to the pulpit.

"Leave all and follow me," was the text of the sermon.

But the meat of the discourse ran more to the words of Jerome who, from his rock-ribbed cave in the East, thundered his still unanswered question: "What will it profit a man to gain the world if he come to lose his soul?"

The speaker told of the evanescent nature of all earthly joys, of the limited scope, at best, of man's life, of the falsity of illicit passions and the utter shallowness of wordly pleasures.

Then, working gradually to the climax, he quoted the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, and pictured to his audience the awful tortures of the lost souls.

There would be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and no hope of abatement, no hope of deliverance for all the endless eons to come.

Women wept.

Men sat straining in their seats.

A young girl shrieked hysterically and was taken out into the churchyard.

The sermon lasted two hours.

A number of people, no longer able to withstand the heat, had left their pews and made their way noiselessly to the door for a breath of air.

Some who had business at home were driving off.

For those who remained in the church there was still the benediction, with the "Salve Regina" and "Tantum Ergo."

And now the wilted, sweltering mass filed nervously out of the edifice and stood on the wide lawn, chatting and drinking in the pure, warm air.

The Rodrays were among the first to leave.

The father was in haste to get away, as many things required his attention, both in the fields and the store.

They had gone some distance when the elder Rodray turned to Maurice and said:

"After dinner, you will take the red team and start in on the oat field. We can't count on this weather after the coming change of the moon, and we must make hay while the sun shines."

This was a blow to Maurice, as he had hoped to take advantage of at least the first day of the mission, and there were to be two more sermons that day, one in the afternoon, the other at night.

The boy stiffened somewhat in his seat, but made no reply.

His mother nudged him.

It was a way she had of instilling revolt.

But Maurice was much prone, of late, to follow his own judgment in matters of personal conduct, and in this instance he wisely persisted in his silence.

Alice, who had remained at home, served the noonday meal.

The churchgoers ate ravenously and had little to say.

Mrs. Rodray alone spoke, but without much response from her hearers.

She kept up a running fire of comment on the eloquence and piety of the speaker, on the attendance of the parishioners, the like of which she had never witnessed in Sanglow; on the heavenly grace that would be bound to flow on such a worthy undertaking, and on the golden opportunity afforded sinners to redeem

their souls through the intervention of those holy and self-sacrificing men.

The natural result of her panegyric was that when all had risen from the table Mrs. Rodray was still toying with her soup; and she was eating a half-hour later when Maurice, in his field clothes, burst into the dining-room on his way to the stables.

The mother attempted to speak, but the youth was in no mood for parley.

Rushing out of the room, he slammed the door behind him and left the house.

That night, Maurice drove to Sanglow.

He hitched Rob to a tree at some distance from the church and walked over to the presbytery.

An old female answered the bell.

"I wish to talk with the father who preached the opening sermon this morning," he said, in French.

"Ah, oui, Monsieur Rodray, le Père Savard," she replied, smiling.

She motioned him to a seat in the parlor, and went after the priest.

The latter came at once.

He was a tall, dark man, with a slight limp.

His face beamed with a smile that never clouded.

His voice was deep and musical.

"At your service, my dear young man," said the priest, closing the door.

And now, for the first time, it struck Maurice that he had undertaken much.

His eyes fell upon the floor, and he flushed perceptibly.

The missionary came over to him and placed his arm tenderly about his neck.

"He who sent you to me, his unworthy servant, will give words to your lips and courage to your heart. Let us recite an 'Ave Maria' Now, then, all is well. Your name, my little man, and how can I serve you?"

Maurice gathered confidence from the words and manner of the priest.

He came to the point at once:

"I want to go to college, and my father says I must remain at home, on the farm. We are the Rodrays, of Lasalle. My father owns a general store and about three hundred acres of farm and timber land. He can well afford to give me an education, but he will not hear of my going away."

"I have heard of your father from Father Nadeau," rejoined Savard. "He is, as I take it, a man of parts and one who has himself a goodly store of knowledge. Have you decided upon a profession?"

"I have thought some of the priesthood."

"Ah, but do you feel that you have the calling, the vocation? It is a serious step, my son!" And the priest shook his head with a sad, inscrutable smile.

"I can not say," replied Maurice; "but I want to go to college. I can not bear this life of the farm."

"My boy, there is a great deal worse," said the good man—"Mon Dieu!—a great deal worse!"

Then, changing his tone to one of decision:

"I will see your father tomorrow," he announced; "tomorrow afternoon!"

Maurice went home with a light heart. Indeed, he whistled and sang aloud all the way.

And the following day he toiled in the oat field without even a thought of grumbling.

Elaine, who was with him in the field, noted his mood and remarked upon it, saying:

"Maurice, what makes you so happy today? You surely have good news."

The youth left the plow and came over to Elaine.

"The best of news," he exclaimed. "For it's safe to say that I am going to college. One of the missionaries has promised to see my father and ask him to let me go."

Maurice did not see the cloud steal over the face of his little friend.

Dazzled by the life which he pictured before him, by the very thought of shaking this filthy soil from his boots, he never saw the tears that welled in her eyes, as he turned away to resume his journey around the field.

She was a strange little parcel of red hair, chubby legs and blue eyes, as she sat on the wooden fence, watching Maurice at his labors.

Her hair ran wild down about her shoulders and her chin rested snugly in her hands.

Anything but French, one would have said.

Yet she was as much so as her father, whose name was Baptiste Le Blanc, and her mother, who had been a Lalonde.

Maurice was the crowning passion of her ten years of life.

To her the tall, uncouth boy was an idol, a protector, something noble and worthy of great love, a being beautiful.

She felt herself drawn to him as to a magnet.

From early childhood, he had hovered over her with all the care and tenderness of a brother for his baby sister.

The green and yellow fields, the river with its roaring cataract, the orchards, the woods on the edge of the village, all had been silent witnesses to their childish love.

The Le Blancs had come to look upon Maurice as a son in the family.

And, indeed, when certain women had whispered "beware," or "maybe this," or "perhaps that," the boy having taken to sprouting like a weed, the simple parents of the little Le Blanc girl bade them be silent for shame.

How could they dream of such a thing?

Why, the boy would give his life for their little Elaine, if need there were.

Under the wing of Maurice, Elaine Le Blanc lived a happy childhood.

She followed him everywhere; to the barns, into the fields, where labor took him.

On grist days, she perched alongside of Maurice, on the spring seat of the big wagon laden with sacks of corn and wheat, in her

arms her rag doll and by her side the basket of lunch prepared by Mamman Le Blanc for the two travelers.

It was a long way to the mill, and the day was consumed with the wearisome trip.

But Maurice entertained his little companion with many stories along the road, and regaled her at intervals with candy and sweets out of his deep, mysterious pockets, which seemed to hold an inexhaustible supply.

At the mill, he would give Elaine into the care of the miller's wife, while he busied himself with the work of unloading and reloading the wagon.

Twilight would see them starting for home with a long ride ahead.

By this time the day's exertions had usually proved too strenuous for Elaine.

She would sit for a while, her little hands in her lap, her short, plump legs hanging tiredly from the seat, and watch the red moon peep over the dark shadows of the horizon.

Then the little weary head would nod for a moment; and she would come to say in her soft, coaxing voice:

"Maurice, put your arm around me: I'm so sleepy!"

The long journey ended, Maurice would deposit the sleeping child in the arms of her mother and, before going home, have a bowl of hot soup saved from the evening meal by Madame Le Blanc.

Before taking leave, he would glance at Elaine, still asleep, on the old hair sofa by the fireplace, and smile timidly at the proud, simple-hearted parents.

Then home—home that was not so much a home to him as was the plain farm house of the Le Blancs, with its long strips of home-made carpet, its warm, old-fashioned hearths, built deep into the walls, its blue and scarlet pictures of the Holy Family and the patron saints, and all the quiet, homelike dignity of humble happiness.

Years had passed since the first trip.

But Elaine had never once missed the monthly journey to the mill. She looked forward to the event as children do to Christmas.

It was a great day.

It was a day when she had her Maurice all to herself, without interruption or the pang of separation.

Then, there were the fishing trips on Saturdays and holidays, when there was no school; and protracted voyages into the woods for flowers and honey trees; and, later on in the year, for beech and butternuts.

It had come to be said by the women in their doorways:

"I see Maurice—Elaine must be near by."

This strong attachment was looked upon with divided feelings by the elder Rodrays.

The father gave it his tacit approval, for he was a champion of early marriage and home life and frowned upon celibacy.

On the other hand, the mother looked with disfavor upon the deepening devotion of her son for the little French girl, believing, as she did, and hoping with all her mother's heart that her sons were destined to the "higher service"—to the priesthood of the chalice and the cross.

Rodray was at work in the store when Father Savard drove up and alighted.

"Mr. Rodray, I believe, sir?"

"Yes, sir, I am William Rodray."

"I have come to have a talk with you, Mr. Rodray, on a subject of some delicacy."

"You refer to my son Maurice and his desire to go to college?"

"Precisely, Mr. Rodray."

"No harm in that," said the storekeeper.

"And that is very well said, sir," replied the priest. "But, to come to the point, I will ask you if you would deliberately stand in the boy's way, once you had reason to believe him called to the service of the Church?"

"I will answer you best by saying that I have no animosity towards the Church as a calling, nor have I any feeling against any one of the professions. It is the natural duty of all men to the soil that has actuated me in the matter of my refusal to send Maurice to college. If you will step with me, sir, to the top of yonder hill, I will point out an object lesson that will be worth the walk."

"I shall go with you gladly," the priest replied.

They climbed in silence to the summit of the hill, from which a wide expanse of country could be seen.

In the valley Maurice was at work with his team. Elaine was astride one of the horses.

They did not seem to see the priest and Rodray.

Savard spoke first.

"A peaceful scene," he remarked, "and one that all but makes me envy yonder lad."

"And yonder lad is Maurice," rejoined the elder Rodray.

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Savard, a trifle taken back by the coincidence.

"Do you see the red house on the knoll, with the gable windows and green shutters?"

"That I do," said Savard.

"Do you see the garden, the shade trees, the driveways, the lawn, the barns and stables?"

"Yes, yes; a beautiful home, sir!"

"And the fields and meadows adjoining the highway from the barns down to the cattle grazing by the river side?"

"Yes, I see perfectly."

"Well, sir, thirty years ago, when I came to this spot, the land I have just shown you was a wilderness of stones and trees. I have given my life to the soil. And behold what the soil has given me in return. Ah, she is a jealous

mistress, but a noble one! Now look to the south, where the smoke is rising from the chimney; the slate-colored house, with the white blinds—do you see?”

Savard nodded.

“Can you see where the fences are broken down and the cattle straying out upon the highway; the broken wheel on the windmill; the shutter hanging by a hinge; the barns in want of paint—tell me, Father Savard, can you see the place—I mean the things I have pointed out to you?”

“Why, yes, most clearly, sir. But what possible bearing can all this have on the business in hand?”

“It’s the house of the Frenchettes,” replied Rodray. “Frenchette and myself came here about the same time. He was a saving, hard-working fellow. He brought with him a young wife to Lasalle. They had a family of five children, three sons and two daughters. Nothing would do but the sons should go to college. Two of them stayed there and became priests. The other studied medicine, and is now ending his ill-spent life, a hopeless victim of drugs. The wretched place now

awaits the sheriff's hammer, to satisfy usurers and creditors, long unpaid."

"You draw a gloomy picture, my dear sir. But, tell me the application of it, to your way of thinking."

"I am thinking," said Rodray, "that it is a devil of a hard matter to say whether a boy has the calling or not; and that if he must take a seven-year course of studies to learn the yea or nay of it, he is mighty lucky to find, in the end, that his path does, in fact, lie that way. For if it do not, and all his preparation be in vain, God help him for a misfitted thing in life, is what I say."

"But, still, it is your duty, my friend, to give the boy the chance to learn his vocation."

"I understand," replied Rodray, his eyes beyond, on the house of the Frenchettes. "I understand," he said a second time.

Then he wheeled about and stood with his back to Savard, who understood that a struggle was taking place between opposing forces. The priest walked off a few paces, fingering the rosary which hung from his belt.

And now Rodray came towards the priest. He was pale and his voice unsteady:

“The lad may go,” said he. “But, mark me, I shall have no further voice in the matter of his calling. I wash my hands of it for all time. He abandons the soil—well, let him lie in his bed as he makes it!”

CHAPTER THREE.

The crops thrived, that year, in the fields of William Rodray.

The soil brought forth a bounteous yield.

The bumpers were filled to overflowing; and the harvest moon rose over peace and plenty in Lasalle.

The summer, with all her gladness, passed away, and autumn, stripped of bloom and blossom, came in stark pregnancy.

Mrs. Rodray had put the last touch to her preparations for her son's departure.

Between smiles and sobs and softly-breathed prayers, she now awaited the tragic hour of his going forth.

It was a cold, gray morning in September; and the earth lay wrapped in a thick, white mantle of rime.

Many of the trees were leafless.

A pale, sickly moon was pasted on the dull sky, like a patch.

Maurice mounted to the seat, beside his father, who took the reins.

Alice came running out of the house with some apples, and, climbing onto the hub, shoved them into Maurice's pockets.

There was a sad effort at cheerfulness from the mother and the girls, who were standing in the doorway of the woodshed.

They held their aprons, and their lips twitched in the struggle to keep back the tears.

William Rodray said no word.

He was like a thing of stone.

The old horse turned down the driveway.

A little hide-covered trunk was in the rear of the wagon.

Maurice pulled up his coat collar and looked back.

The women were weeping now, their faces buried in their aprons.

Maurice felt something strange, like a clutch, at his throat; but he choked it back.

He was on the path of his desire.

In the house of the Le Blancs, a little, tear-streamed face gazed out upon the wagon, as it crept over the hill and passed out of sight.

CHAPTER FOUR.

The old, gray college had taken on an air of activity and life.

The iron gates of the courtyard banged incessantly, as Brother Beatrix swung them to and fro for the wagon-loads of trunks and boxes that were arriving for the students.

It was the first Monday in September—the day set for the opening of the classes; and the long corridors of the building, the visitors' apartments and the play-grounds in the rear of the college swarmed with students and their relatives.

Here and there, in the dingy, ill-lighted parlors, a sob broke out above the hubbub of chatter, where a mother was taking her first leave of a young son.

Some looked upon it all as a pleasant novelty; and laughed in anticipation of the congés and the many visits to come.

Young boys—mere babes in years, munched sweetmeats and clung to their mothers' dresses, quite unsuspecting of the pangs of the separation that was nearing for them.

In the play-grounds, groups of boys stood chatting and getting acquainted, while others indulged in a game of lacrosse, baseball, or cricket.

In the recreation hall, where a refreshment-stand had been established, one of the older students, who was working his way, was selling chocolates, burnt almonds, pies, cakes and fruits.

A little farther on, baseball bats, lacrosse sticks, stilts, hand-balls, and a variety of sporting goods were selling at a good profit to the institution.

At the far end of the room a priest was chatting pleasantly with a group of boys and taking applications for enrollment in the Société de St. Louis de Gonzague and the Société des Enfants de Marie.

Here and there in the black swarm, a lonely little soul might be seen keping timidly to himself, in the shadow of the walls, or standing apart on the skirt of a group of noisy young-

sters, not venturing to take part in the play or the conversation.

Sometimes two of these lonely ones chanced to meet and form an acquaintance.

This was perhaps the starting point of a friendship that would endure through the long years of college life, nay, who might say?—till life was at an end.

Maurice Rodray arrived on the noon train.

A number of students were going in as he reached the college.

He followed them, with an indefinable sense of awe.

There was a cold, forbidding aspect to the great stone building, that reminded him of stories he had read of prisons and donjon-keeps.

He hesitated on the threshold.

The homestead at Lasalle, the trees, the river, the fields, Alice, Elaine, flashed before him in panorama. The little world he had fled seemed, of a sudden, bright and alluring.

A lay brother motioned him, impatiently, to enter.

He obeyed.

"From the country, I perceive?" remarked the brother.

"Yes, sir, from Lasalle."

"Little matter; they'll take the dross off your coat, my lad."

The youth bit his lip and walked away into the hall, his face a deep red.

Maurice saw a priest emerge from one of the guests' parlors and turn off towards the lower end of the hall.

He caught up with him.

"Father!" he said.

"Well, mon ami?" replied the priest, slapping the youth good-naturedly on the back.

"I am Maurice Rodray, from Lasalle," began the newcomer, producing a letter, written by Father Nadeau, and another, by Savard, and addressed to the rector of the college, introducing Maurice.

"Ah, oui, this is the young monsieur Rodray, of Lasalle! I have heard of you from the good Father Savard himself. He wants us to consider you his protégé. But," said he, upon a brief scrutiny of Maurice, "this is a fine young man, this young Rodray, of Lasalle! Have you had any Latin?"

"No."

"Too bad ; I wanted you in my class—Versification. But, the world is not going to split over that, is it, Maurice? Allons! We shall go, together, to the Father Rector. I will leave you with him, for he will likely wish to give you a word or two of advice. But, Maurice, come and see me—you understand? 'Sans cérémonie,' you know ; yes, come and see me!"

"I would like to know your name," ventured Maurice, becoming more assured.

"Demers—Father Demers."

The rector, an old, gray-haired man with thick spectacles, received the young Rodray kindly, and turned him over, after a moment's conversation, to the prefect, Father Lacroix.

The prefect took him to his professor, and, after a brief introduction, handed him over to an older student, by name Bangneulo.

The latter was to act as the new student's guardian in the matter of acquainting him with the rules and routine of the college.

"Well," said Bangneulo, when they were by themselves, "what do you think of it, so far?"

Maurice had no answer. He looked up into the face of his companion, as if to find one there.

"The 'crows' are hell," said the guardian;
"you'll find that out."

"The 'crows'?"

"Yes, the professors and prefects. Oh, you have lots to learn! Where are you from?"

"Lasalle."

"Not from the city, eh? What class are you in?"

"I don't know; I've had no Latin."

"Are you going to take the classics?"

"Yes."

"That's seven years. I have three more to do. Here comes a toad—Chaput. He's got an idea that he's a bully. But I blacked both his eyes, last year, for stealing figs out of my trunk in the dormitory: They starve you here."

Chaput came boldly up to the pair and stopped short in front of Maurice.

He was a short, stocky fellow, with an evil glint in his small black eyes.

His hair was straight and jet, like an Indian's.

His face and neck were covered with pimples and black-heads.

He addressed Maurice in French:

"Where are you from?"

"I come from Lasalle."

"The devil, you say! And pray tell me where is Lasalle?"

Maurice caught the sneer on the other's face and understood the nudge from Bangneulo.

The gibe of the lay brother was still fresh in his mind.

"You'll do well to study your map, Monsieur 'Pimpleface,' and attend to your own affairs."

"Well said, my lord," retorted Chaput, growing white under the sting, but with an admirable effort at composure. "Well said," he repeated, bowing low, in mock humility. "I do believe we'll be able to make something of him—upon my word! Will my lord excuse his humble servant? Au revoir, Monseigneur! Au plaisir!" And he strode off towards a group of students at the other side of the grounds.

"I like your grit," said Bangneulo, when they were alone again. "But you'll have to watch him. You should have knocked him down. Do you box?"

"Box?"

"Yes—this way?"

"No; in Lasalle I had no need for that sort of thing."

"Have you never had any battles in school?"

"Oh, yes, lots of them."

"You did, eh? How did you come out?"

"Well, I'm not much of a fighter; but I have always managed to take care of myself."

"There's the bell," said Bangneulo. "We have to fall in ranks for supper."

The students came, in response to the bell, from all parts of the building and grounds and assembled in the main hall.

In a few minutes the second bell rang. The students now fell in in the military formation of "company front." At the third bell, which sounded a moment later, the long line came to a "left face" and moved off in double file in the direction of the refectory.

There was more than one awkward movement on the part of newcomers, but the majority of the boys had been in college at least one year; and these guided the undrilled.

The refectory was a long hall, with rows of tables on either side.

Wooden benches served as seats.

Each table seated from twelve to fourteen students.

A religious or historical work was read aloud by one of the older students during the meal.

On holidays conversation was allowed.

It happened, strangely enough, that Maurice was assigned to a seat directly opposite Chaput.

For the latter he had already conceived an implacable hatred. The fellow's face, actions, speech and manner were repulsive to him.

After the incident of the afternoon, Chaput paid no heed to Maurice, but contented himself with eyeing him covertly when Rodray was in sight.

At the table, he sucked his soup loudly and gulped his food like a savage.

His mouth and chin were smeared with grease and atoms of meat and bread.

He criticised the food aloud, saying it was not fit for pigs.

"In that event, Monsieur Chaput, you, above all, should refuse to eat it," said the sub-prefect, who was passing the table at that moment, and overheard the remark.

Then, by way of good measure, he added: "You will copy three hundred lines of Aristotle in the original Greek. Have it ready for me by bedtime, day after tomorrow."

The sub-prefect, Father Adam, was a thin, dark, undersized man, who preferred sarcasm to good wine. He was a terror to the students, by whom he was thoroughly disliked.

Maurice had but poorly satisfied his hunger when the signal was given to rise.

And there were others of the "new ones" who glanced longingly at the food left on the tables, as they filed out of the refectory.

That night, on his cot, Maurice remained awake, long after the lights were out, and went over the incidents of the day.

He was sorry, now, that he had not struck Chaput.

He felt that he could easily have whipped him.

He worked himself into a fever.

He saw himself lay low this insolent fellow with a single blow.

He could hear the others shouting their admiration for him, the newcomer, and their exultation over Chaput's defeat.

Then the bitter thought came to him that he had missed, out of sheer stupidity, the chance to attain, in one stroke, an enviable standing among his fellows.

He dwelt, with bitterness of heart, on the affront offered him on the very threshold of the college by a lay brother.

He smarted, even now, under the sting of this rude fellow's words.

The more so, when it occurred to him that this man was beneath him; that he was but a lackey in black cloth, performing menial tasks for the priests, and, as to attainment or education—a blank.

Perhaps Bangneulo was right about the "crows."

He regretted not having gone to another college, on the outskirts of the city, where the sons of plain people and country folk were not despised for a little mud on their boots.

Here, at Saint Mary's, they all seemed to think themselves of the nobility.

They went with their heads in air, with haughty manners ill becoming their stations, which were, in truth, no better than his own.

It was very late, and the dormitory snored loudly when he fell asleep.

The following day, Maurice was assigned to "Syntax," the lowest of the Latin grades.

He went through the various phases of initiation like one who, seeing many unwonted things at once, retains but a vague impression of the whole.

There were sixty pupils in his class.

He came into the class-room with a bundle of new books under his arm.

The seats, for the most part, were taken.

The professor was speaking.

Maurice stood before him, hesitating.

There was a sudden ripple of laughter among the students.

The professor glanced at Maurice, who was now blushing deeply.

"Well, my good man," said the priest, "can you not find a seat? Have I your name on the roster?"

Maurice did not find words at once.

He tried to speak, but his lips refused to move.

He felt the spirit of ridicule bubbling about him.

A student left his place and, coming over to Maurice, pointed out a vacant seat in the rear of the room.

Rodray turned round to see.

The faces of the students grinned maliciously.

There were titters, cat-mews, groans.

"Silence!" shouted the priest, coming down heavily upon the desk with his ruler.

Then, to, Maurice, in a quiet tone:

"Your name?"

"I am Maurice Rodray—from Lasalle."

"Take the vacant seat on the left aisle, in the last row."

CHAPTER FIVE.

Maurice settled down to his studies and waged a losing battle with "Mensa" and "L'Epitome."

Latin was a stone wall before him.

The declensions were a maze; the conjugations impossible.

Others in his class made headway and received commendation for their work.

But it struck Maurice that these, who needed it less, were assisted through difficult passages by the professor, while he, who was at the tail-end of the class, was passed over without notice.

In the examinations preceding the Christmas holidays, Maurice was among the last five of his class.

On the eve of the home-going, he was on his way to the study-hall, when he met up with Father Rhéaume, his professor.

The latter was coming out of the refectory and seemed in good spirits.

"Ah, Rodray," he said, not unkindly. "I have been promising myself a word with you. Tell me, my son, do you not think it would be better for you to step down, for a while, into the French class, and there build up a stronger foundation? I had a talk with Father Savard, the other day, about you."

"Father Savard? Has he been here?"

"For a few moments, on his way through the city."

"And you—you told him of this—failure of mine?"

"Why, my son, you look at it in the wrong light, I assure you. It is not your fault—but ours. We should have given you time to grasp the classics instead of plunging you, without a moment's notice, into Greek and Latin."

"I could never consent to that," said Maurice after a moment's silence.

The priest placed his finger over the boy's heart.

"So fell the angels! Maurice, beware of pride. And, during the holidays, give my suggestion thought.

"You are going home, I dare say?"

"Until you spoke to me, I was going; but now I shall remain here."

"Well, well, and why this sudden resolution? What will your good parents be thinking?"

"I would like to go, to be sure, but I'll not. I'm going to stay here and study."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Rhéaume, clapping his student on the back. "Bravo, my son! And rest assured that I shall help you. We shall start in tomorrow!"

It came as a shock to Mrs. Rodray, that Maurice would not be home for the holidays.

She had a great many things to tell him.

And, besides, she had counted not a little on the honor of walking up the main aisle of the church, Christmas day, on the arm of her eldest son, "home from college."

She had grown quite proud of his being there.

She would find a way, invariably, to introduce the subject to friends and strangers alike.

It would be "since my son has gone to the Jesuits"; or, "I feel quite lost without Mau-

rice, my boy, who is in college"; or, again, "Ah, God is a jealous master! He gives me a son and takes him from me. The dear boy is in the Jesuits' College, you know. He hopes to become a priest."

"A mother's heart," she would often say, "a mother's heart! Who but a mother knows what it is to love? Now, there's my Maurice; gone, you might say; he is with the Jesuits, you know—studying for the priesthood. Ah, how we suffer, we poor mothers!"

However, she resigned herself reluctantly to her son's letter and set about to prepare a box of sweets and delicacies for the absent one.

This was done by the mother and the girls. George drove to the station, that night, with the box, while the elder Rodray was away from home.

For the father must not know of this.

The latter, on the other hand, upon hearing of Maurice's decision to remain at the college, wrote him a long letter in which he spoke of the horses, the cattle, the sheep, and the cutting of cord-wood in the timber land.

He admonished his son to give all his time to study, to shun evil companions and, if at any

time he might be tempted, to give women a wide berth.

There was a twenty-dollar bill in the letter —“a Christmas gift which, I trust, you will put to good use and of which I enjoin you not to speak to your mother.”

Maurice flushed as he read that part of the letter which told of the live stock and the wood.

An American, from Montana, who was also spending the holidays at the college, was coming towards him at this moment.

He folded the letter hastily and put it in his pocket.

When the classes reopened, in January, Maurice was well grounded in the declensions and regular conjugations.

True to his word, Rhéaume had spent every available moment of his time drilling his pupil.

“Do you see the tall, dark boy yonder?” the priest would say to guests or intimates. “What do you think of him? A good face, is it not? He is making Syntax under a handicap. I tried to reason with him, to show him that he would do better to step down a grade. And what do you think he did? He refused point-blank! And don’t you know that he is going to make

it? Yes, sir, hanging on by his teeth, and going to make it!"

After the return of the students, the life of the college settled down into the monotony of dull routine.

At Easter, Mrs. Rodray came to see Maurice. Alice was with her.

They were shown into one of the guests' parlors. Mrs. Rodray carried a little black satchel; Alice a large carpet-bag, which was overweighted and bulging.

Upon Maurice's appearance in the doorway, the mother began to weep.

Alice ventured to say that she should not carry on in this style; that there were other people in the room, and that Maurice would not be apt to take it in good part.

The latter had halted, for a moment, to speak to a priest in the doorway.

He came over now to the women.

He made a faint effort at a smile.

He was visibly put out at sight of his mother, who was now wiping her eyes and smiling at him in her tears.

Alice rose to kiss her brother, and sat down again.

There were two red spots on her cheeks. She shuffled her hands in her lap and moved her feet nervously on the rough floor.

Her hair was banged over the forehead and done in a big knot at the back of her head.

She wore a plaid woolen dress of a gray and black mixture.

The skirt, which fell above her boot-tops, showed two white bands of stockings.

Mrs. Rodray was tastily dressed in black and wore gloves and a new bonnet.

After the first few words of greeting, there was an interval of silence.

Alice, with a view to starting a conversation, caught up the carpet-bag and made as if to open it.

Maurice took her arm:

"Don't open that here," he said, in a hoarse undertone. "My God! I would never hear the end of it from the students!"

Alice dropped the bag and looked up at her brother, and from him to Mrs. Rodray.

The mother was gazing at the son, her hands crossed over the little satchel, an ecstatic smile lighting up her pale, thin face, a strange, glint-like fire in her brown eyes.

"If you're ashamed of me, Maurice, I can go back home," said Alice, going white.

She was on her feet as she spoke.

Maurice laid his hands upon hers and said:

"No, no, Alice; I never meant anything like that—you know I didn't. But the boys, you know," turning to Mrs. Rodray for confirmation, "the boys are such upstarts! I'll have a porter take it up to the dormitory, after a while, and put it under my bed."

"Why, what a silly thing to say, Alice!" said Mrs. Rodray. "Ashamed of you? What an idea! Poor girl! You have your father's temper—oh, that man! that cruel man!"

"Mother," said Maurice, "leave off this family talk; some one may overhear it; and, besides, it's very disagreeable to sit here and go over those things."

"Why, Maurice!" exclaimed the mother, "what has come over you? You never acted like this before. I thought surely to find consolation here, with you, for whom I have made so many sacrifices!"

As she spoke, the tears welled again in her eyes, and her lips twitched in the effort to restrain them.

At this moment, Father Rhéaume entered the room.

Maurice called him over to his party.

"He is my eldest son," said Mrs. Rodray to the priest, smiling sweetly. "Ah, you priests are such noble men! A mother should be glad, indeed, to give her son to the Church. I believe, in fact, that, in doing this, I will find great consolation and a reward for past sacrifices."

"I had no idea," remarked Rhéaume, "that our Maurice had thoughts of the priesthood."

The priest glanced from son to mother.

Mrs. Rodray said no more, but looked at Maurice with a strange fixity of gaze and a smile that hovered close to tears.

They left early.

Mrs. Rodray broke down completely at the leave-taking, and Maurice experienced a sudden relief when the mother and sister had gone.

He had never had this feeling towards Mrs. Rodray in the past.

But, to-day, she had seemed to have about her an indefinable atmosphere of impending disaster.

She was ever too eager to air her troubles to strangers.

And that would never do here in the college.

She dragged out the family skeleton for the gaze and scrutiny of all or any who wished to hear or see, much as his father showed off his finest horses—at least such had been her habit in Lasalle; and he knew she had not changed her habit in so short a while.

And Alice!

Why had his mother not seen to her clothes?

No gloves.

And then, those abominable white rags of stockings!

Things ran on smoothly to the end of June, and the close of the first year of his studies saw him rise from a despised tail-ender to be the twentieth pupil in a class of sixty.

There was now the summer vacation of two months.

Maurice went back to Lasalle.

He came at the close of the day.

The elder Rodray met him at the station.

Farmers and idlers stood about in little groups on the platform.

They knew Maurice.

But, few spoke to him.

Some raised their hats in silent salutation.

There was, already, a gap between this son of the soil and the tillers thereof.

Maurice had straightened.

The stoop in the shoulders was gone.

His chin struck a higher angle, and he seemed a trifle conscious of superiority.

Rob, the favorite horse of the returning son, turned his head to Maurice. He whinnied in recognition and pricked up his ears.

The station-master hoisted the student's trunk onto the spring-wagon of the Rodways.

It was a large, square, massive thing. The little hide-covered thing he had taken away was not there.

Along the way, the wheat and oat fields lay in velvet mantles of green.

The frogs were piping their shrill songs, to which Maurice had been wont to listen as a farm lad.

The wild flowers were bursting forth in riotous bloom along the banks of the dusty, yellow highway.

Men and women stood in their doorways, staring, as father and son drove by.

On the hill beyond, on the veranda of the Rodway homestead, a little knot of white-aproned women waved white kerchiefs to the returning son, seated beside his father in the wagon.

When the greeting was over and the hubbub of excitement had subsided to a softer note, Mrs. Rodray stole away to her bedroom and wept—wept for very joy.

For was this not a day to remember?

Was there another mother in all Lasalle who had so much cause to rejoice?

CHAPTER SIX.

On the morrow of his home-coming, Maurice rose late.

Through the open window of his bedroom, on the upper floor, a warm breeze swelled the white mull curtains, like sails in gracious winds.

The apple orchard below had lost its bloom, and the round, green fruit was beginning to peep through the heavy foliage.

A robin chirped boldly on the top of the nearest tree and, seeing Maurice, flew away.

He gazed long upon the simple scene.

His mind groped through a maze of things which came to him obscurely, like the remnant of a dream.

This he knew:

Some change was taking place within him; a slow, subtle change which passed his understanding, and in the process of which he was, like potter's clay, a plastic and helpless subject.

He was conscious of a very definite desire to become a great man in the world.

He pictured himself leading an army in battle; or, garbed in the black robe of the pleader, crushing, with sheer eloquence of speech, the case of the Crown against one whom the world knew to be guilty; or, again, he saw himself appealed to by the sick and diseased of the realm as the court of last resort in the healing of human ills.

The paths of glory called him.

But it was the pulpit which drew him most—the mysticism of the Word and the glory of the latter-day prophet.

Ah, Notre Dame! Just to preach an Easter sermon in the Basilica of Notre Dame!

He thought of the respectful bearing towards him, of the villagers and farmers at the station upon his arrival.

They would bow lower than that, some day!

He would soar upon the wings of greatness.

Then, a humiliating thought came to him, unbidden: At the college he was nobody; a mediocre student; a country lad; conspicuous for no other quality than that of being the tallest and oldest student of his class.

He turned from the window.

His mother was calling him.

Her voice came to his ears like an echo:

"My son, your breakfast is waiting."

While he was eating, the father came into the room.

Mrs. Rodray, Alice and George were seated around the table, their eyes on Maurice, who vouchsafed, between mouthfuls, sidelights on his life in college.

Maurice was sparing with these little scraps of information bearing upon himself, and dealt them out slowly and with a show of dignity becoming an eldest son.

Upon the entrance of the elder Rodray the family lapsed into silence.

The father was in his stable clothes, which smelled strongly of cattle, and his long boots were crusted with dung. He said:

"When you have eaten, Maurice, I want you to take a walk with me; I shall be in the store."

William Rodray was sorting a pile of dried hides in the store-room, cutting off the tail-tips and horns, and making two separate heaps, one of flawless, the other of imperfect skins.

He straightened up from his task and looked at Maurice as the latter entered the room.

The younger Rodray noticed, for the first time since his return to Lasalle, that his father had aged during the months of his absence.

The lines in the face were deeper ; there were more gray hairs on the temples and around the edge of the heavy shock.

Too, he fancied that his father stooped a little now.

"I shall lock up the store," said William Rodray, taking down a heavy key from its peg on the wall and proceeding to suit the action to the word.

He led his son to the stables, where he showed him certain improvements which had been made.

New mangers had been installed, and a long wooden duct had been built, which ran the entire length of the stables, at the outer edge of the stalls, for the purpose of carrying away the urine to a cistern in the barnyard :

"For," explained he, "it is an excellent fertilizer of the soil.

"We will now walk over to the pasture—I have bought some very fine stock while you have been away."

On their way to the pasture, the father pointed out certain changes which, he thought, would increase the yield of the crops.

"You must give the soil a chance to rest, to retrieve itself—much the same as men. It would never do to keep on sowing the same field for ever and ever in wheat, or in corn, or in oats. In fact, I would be in favor, if I had sufficient land, and could afford it, of letting the fields take turn about and have a year off, once every so often—a holiday of the soil. The land would be the better for it."

At the bars of the pasture, he pointed out to Maurice three Jersey cows and a bull which had been added to the stock that spring.

A fine bay gelding looked up from the grass and came galloping over to the gate.

The cows followed slowly, mooing.

"Over there, in the large field, is all the old stock that was here when you went away; I want them all to get acquainted gradually. It's not safe to turn strange cattle into the same field with the old stock.

"I have turned the sheep over to Duquette for the summer; sheep ruin the land."

Maurice stroked the cool, wet noses of the cows.

But when he attempted to caress the gelding, he turned about, kicked up his feet and galloped off again.

"Well," said the father, turning to Maurice, "what do you think of the farm now? Or are you still determined to fight it out with Caesar?"

"Yes, father, I have begun, and I am going to fight it out."

"Ah, well," said the older one.

And now, again, it struck the son that the father was growing old.

In the afternoon, Maurice walked over to the Le Blanc's.

Mrs. Le Blanc was churning in the summer kitchen.

She hesitated an instant, then clasped the youth about the neck and planted a kiss squarely on his lips.

Baptiste Le Blanc was in the fields.

"Elaine!" cried the mother, running out into the yard and looking up at the open window of her daughter's room. "Elaine, my girl, come down quick; some one is here to see you!"

Elaine came into the room.

She had grown.

She smiled at sight of the guest, and, walking up to him, took the proffered hand.

"Well, and is that all?" queried Mrs. Le Blanc, thoroughly happy, and enjoying the evident embarrassment of the two youngsters.

Then Maurice took the yielding child in his arms and kissed her, as had been his wont in the old days.

Nothing would do but that Maurice should stay for supper.

And when Baptiste came in from the fields, he must open a quart of gooseberry wine, which was served with generous slices of "la bonne femme's" cake.

"Elaine goes to the convent in September," said Manman Le Blanc to Maurice; "we have about decided on Saint Athanase."

The two parents looked at young Rodray, as if to ask him if the plan met with his approval.

Maurice remarked that both they, the parents, and Elaine would suffer from the separation.

"You know," he said, with the air of one who has seen much of life, "she is the only child. But, of course, it will be very nice in the

end. For there is nothing to be compared to an education."

"Of course," rejoined Mrs. Le Blanc, "it will be very trying, especially at first. But we will try to get over the ennui; is it not so, 'la Petite'?"

Elaine, seated close to Maurice, bit into her cake and nodded to her mother, smiling.

"Why, Mamman," broke in Baptiste, "Saint Athanase is but eighteen miles from Lasalle. Just a short run for the black team."

"Bah!" he exclaimed, springing from his seat and coming over to Elaine. "We shall see her every week when the roads are fit."

So saying, he stroked her cheek for a moment thoughtfully. Then he added:

"We must make a fine lady of our 'Petite.' Is it not so, Mamman? French, English, music, needlework, mon Dieu, goodness knows what not! Maurice, you'll not know her. I tell you, you'll not know her—some day!"

With that, he tossed off a glass of the gooseberry wine, lighted his pipe and went out to feed the pigs.

In the evening, Baptiste hitched his best horse to the new phaeton and led it around to the front of the house.

"Jump in, you two, and take a drive," said he to Maurice and Elaine. "Sapristi, if there's a horse in the country that can reach this fellow's heels, I want to see him."

He caressed the noble brute, stroking its neck, and held the bridle while the pair got in.

And as they drove down the winding pike and disappeared in the shadows of the night, Baptiste Le Blanc and his wife stood gazing silently after them.

In the long summer months Maurice spent much time with Elaine.

At home he was treated more like a guest than a son of the family.

He rose late.

His breakfast was cooked separately for him or kept warm in the oven till such time as he came down from his room.

Delicacies were saved and set apart for him.

If it was ham, the leaner slice was for Maurice.

The outer cut of a roast must go to him, for he liked his meat well done.

If there was a shortage of any fruit or vegetable, Maurice was not permitted to suffer

therefrom, for he was always the first to be served.

And no one made objection, not even William Rodray, who believed in absolute equality among his children.

The latter was, himself, a man of austere appetite.

He counted himself well started out upon the day with a rasher or two of salt pork, boiled potatoes and a bowl of weak tea.

A plump hen for Sunday, a fat goose for special occasions, and plenty of plain fare the year round—what more could one wish for? he was wont to say.

The summer fled like a dream.

Again the day of parting came.

Maurice went back to his studies. Elaine Le Blanc to the convent of Notre Dame at Saint Athanase.

The Le Blancs drove over to the convent.

The leave-taking went hard with the mother, who broke down, towards the last, and wept.

Baptiste, who had something of a woman's heart himself, kissed Elaine, without speaking, and, turning his back upon the women, walked down the gravel path to the roadside and untethered the team.

When his wife joined him, his eyes had a tell-tale moistness and he dared not trust his voice to speech.

They had left the little city several miles behind.

A few faint stars were out.

The wind had risen.

The Richelieu was lashing the river bank, grumbling loudly.

Baptiste brought the horses to a stop and, turning to Mamman Le Blanc:

"Shall we turn round and go back for her?" he asked. "Something tells me this is a bad business, after all, Mamman, and it's going to be dreadfully lonesome without 'la Petite.' What do you say, Mamman—shall we turn back?"

"I think we would do better to leave her there till next week, and see, then, what she thinks about it," replied the wife. "But, I see now how lonesome it's going to be, Baptiste."

"As you say," sighed the man, pulling on the reins and turning off on the pike that led to Lasalle.

The home was very lonely without Elaine, who was the only child.

The first week seemed an eternity without her.

And when Thursday came, at last, which was visiting day at the convent, it was with the full expectation of bringing her back home that the Le Blancs set out for Saint Athanase.

But they found their daughter well pleased with the new life, and unwilling to give it up to return to Lasalle.

So, once more they drove back alone, a great void in their hearts.

One day Le Blanc came in from the fields later than usual.

He had little to say during supper.

He lighted his pipe and crossed his legs in front of the blazing hearth.

Mamman Le Blanc was clearing away the table, singing an old French song at her work:

“Un Canadien errant
Banni de son foyer
Parcourait en pleurant
Des pays étrangers.”

“I say, Mamman,” said Baptiste, breaking his long silence, “what think you of this education business, anyhow? You think it’s really worth while?”

The wife turned to Baptiste:

"Worth while? Why, yes, of course, Baptiste. But, what are you thinking of? Maybe I don't get your meaning."

"I mean Elaine. She's got four years to go, over there, and I've been thinking what will it amount to in the end? Will she be nearer to us or farther away—I mean in the heart, you know. You saw what one week did—one short week; she preferred the place to us. Of course, I know she loves us; but, I say, what will it come to four years from now? Will she be content to live here on the farm; to wed in Lasalle; and bear children to a man who, as there are many hereabouts, has no greater idea of life than to eat, drink and go to bed with his wife? I fear, Mamman, we have done unwisely for 'la Petite,' and in saying that I mean for her own good. Maybe we have done much to make her unhappy."

"My dear, you always did run far ahead to meet trouble, and so you are doing now. It is the best thing for Elaine. It can not hurt her. And as for her marriage, when the time comes, she can find a suitor, easily enough, among the young professionals. She is a very loving

child and I can not but believe she will always be the same to us."

Baptiste lapsed into silence again, and Mamman took up the thread of her song:

"Un jour, triste et pensif,
Assis aux bord des flots
Au courant fugitif
Il adressait ces mots."

Maurice corresponded with Elaine.

The latter was very much taken up with the life of the convent and was fond of the sisters who, she said, were very good and kind.

Her father and mother were weekly visitors at the convent and saw to it that she wanted for nothing.

She was getting along splendidly in her studies, and was, indeed, very happy, only for the thought of him, Maurice, for whom she felt, at times, very lonesome.

Her letters usually terminated in an outburst of naive confidences as to the future and simple expressions of her attachment for him.

Sometimes she would enclose the picture of a saint, an "Agnus Dei," or a little medal, which she had purchased for him at the store in the convent.

And Maurice sent her gifts in kind.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

Four years passed quickly enough.

Maurice applied himself diligently to his studies and progressed, by slow degrees, to an enviable position of excellence in class standing.

In the final examinations in "Rhetoric," he divided honors with a French student from Sorel.

Two years remained for him in "Philosophy."

Elaine had finished her four-year course.

She was the belle of the convent, a maid of queenly bearing.

The red hair of the child had turned to burnished gold.

The large, blue eyes seemed to have sunken deeper beneath the long, black lashes.

And the form of her, slim and willowy, harmonized with her graceful step, like the cadence of voluptuous music.

Maurice and Elaine had written but little to each other in the last year.

A birthday letter and one at Easter—that was all.

There had been no estrangement.

It was but the natural death of a childhood love.

Elaine had grown to be more reserved, or perhaps, less expressive of her feelings, as she progressed in years, which was to be expected in one of her sex.

Maurice had given much thought, of late, to the question of his future.

He leaned to the priesthood; but did not feel sure of the vocation.

Father Savard was now attached to the college. Maurice consulted him frequently.

Together they took long walks on the promenade overlooking the playgrounds. Time after time, the pair went over the subject of young Rodray's future life work.

But they never seemed to reach a solution of the trying problem.

Savard would say:

"Of course, you know, my dear Maurice, that I can only do so much and that then and there

my duty seals my lips. I can not make the decision for you. If it were only a matter of deciding between law and medicine, it would be a comparatively easy matter. But between the world and the priesthood of God—oh, my son, that is a very different thing, and I would not have it upon my soul to have advised you wrong.”

“I know, I know,” Maurice would say in reply. “But, if it were only given me to see!”

The end of the scholastic year found him in the same uncertain frame of mind.

He dared not make decision.

And when the college closed its doors for the summer vacation, he turned once more towards Lasalle, perturbed in spirit and racked with a thousand doubts.

George met him at the station.

The father had been stricken with apoplexy that day, while hoeing in the garden.

There had been three doctors at the house the greater part of the day.

They thought he would live.

“Father hasn’t done much with the farm this year,” said George. “I told him in April that I wanted to go to college this coming fall and it

seemed to break him all up. He hasn't taken much heart in anything since. He says the country's going to the devil. The barns and stables need a coat of paint, but he's kept putting it off all spring, saying he doesn't see the use. 'Twas all I could do to get him to repair the fences where the rails had been broken and cattle were straying into the fields."

When they reached the house, Father Nadeau was there. He shook Maurice warmly by the hand.

"You must come to see me, Maurice"; he said. "It is time you and I were having a little talk about the future."

Then he tip-toed his way to the front door and closed it softly behind him.

The father lay upon the bed.

The merest movements of the white covering betrayed a lingering spark of life.

The face was cadaverous; the skin tight and drawn and of a pasty pallor; the lips purplish.

The eyes were closed.

About the head the long white hair accentuated the death-like features of the man.

Maurice shuddered at the sight of this, his father.

Mrs. Rodray entered the sick room and beckoned him away.

"Oh, my son," she began, "what a time I have had with him! He hasn't the heart of a stone. For months he has done nothing but rail at schools and colleges. And he says the priests are to blame for the land being abandoned. He says they encourage the young men to leave the farms and go to college in the city. And he blames me for your going away, and says I am putting it into George's head to do the same. And there's Alice, going to be married this August. And here I am, alone, with him this way on my hands, without so much as a kind word, or a soul to help me!"

Maurice heard her out in silence. When she had done, he changed the subject abruptly.

"Have you anything to eat? I declare I am famished."

And when meat was laid upon the table: "And now," said he, "I beg of you, let us talk of something pleasant."

Alice blushed and told of her approaching marriage.

The bridegroom to be was the son of a prosperous farmer in the neighboring parish of

Saint Valentine and himself a young notary just out of the university.

His name was Francois Grégoire.

He was a tall, well-built fellow of mild manner.

The Rodrays were pleased with the match.

Alice was desperately in love.

She sat at the parlor window for an hour or two before the time appointed for his visits, gazing anxiously down the pike that led from Saint Valentine, her fingers nervously thrumming the window sill, or opening and closing a little black silk fan which Maurice had sent her from the city.

Mrs. Rodray had telegraphed for Ann, the eldest daughter, who was living with her husband in Quebec.

The couple had been married five years and had already three children, two girls and a boy.

They were looking for another in the fall.

They had not prospered.

They lived from hand to mouth in a crazy, weather-beaten tenement in Irishtown, near the river front.

Hugh O'Malley, the husband, had aban-

doned the strenuous life of a traveling auctioneer to stay at home and be closer to his wife, as he put it.

He cared little for what he termed "the luxuries and pomposities of life," and it must be said that he saw very little of them.

He professed himself thoroughly happy with Ann.

He reeled home drunk three or four times a week with a lump of beef or mutton under his arm and a paper-back novel for his wife, whom he conciliated with the gift; for Ann had not lost her love for the heroes of Romance.

With the baby nursing at her breast and the two older ones rolling at her feet or tugging at her skirts, she would sit, by the hour, her work undone, and the rooms in frightful disorder, and read to the "finis" the latest peace offering of her bibulous lord.

She was eternally with child.

"Give me a potful of potatoes," O'Malley would say to his intimates, "and a fat jug of ale and my wife—and the devil take the rest! Let the young ones come as fast as they like; that's God's business, and I'm only his servant, to be sure."

They had not gone back to Lasalle since their wedding.

The Rodrays knew little of their affairs.

The telegram was delivered to Ann while O'Malley was away from the house.

She took it down to the dock where he was employed as a tally clerk.

He read the message over several times without speaking.

"Well," said Ann, finally, "can I go?"

"Can you go? To be sure, you can! And so will I—and the lot of us!"

"But, the fare? Can you raise the money to take us?"

"Leave that to me, Annie dear. It'll be a cold day when I can't get you as far as Lasalle. And where you are, it's my duty to be, likewise, to be sure."

A second telegram was sent the O'Malleys the night of Maurice's arrival at Lasalle.

The message said it would not be necessary to come home, as the elder Rodray was now out of danger.

But the O'Malleys were now on their way.

They had taken the night steamer for Montreal.

They arrived at Lasalle the following night. The Rodrays had received no word of their coming.

There was no one to meet them at the station.

So they walked the three miles to the homestead.

They were a pathetic sight as they left the pike and turned up the gravel driveway to the house.

Ann, in a cheap, faded, black dress, trudged behind O'Malley, holding the babe in her arms. There was a careless droop in her figure and her hair, from beneath a disreputable bonnet, showed itself to be sadly in need of the comb.

O'Malley went ahead, leading the oldest girl by the hand and carrying the other in his arms.

His trousers came above his ankles and the coat was very short in the skirt and at the sleeves.

The suit was of a greenish black, worn slick and shiny.

A narrow white collar, almost entirely hidden by a ready-made, black band-bow, surmounted a white shirt, which was streaked with the soil of travel.

The children wore white muslin bonnets that barely hung onto the backs of their heads, so small they were and insufficient.

The two girls wore little black shoes of thick, stiff leather, with copper toes.

Their dresses, of coarse white muslin, bore unmistakable stains of the journey.

On making the turn from the pike, they found themselves in plain view of the house.

O'Malley stopped and craned his neck anxiously, expecting to see crepe on the front door.

"He's not dead yet," he remarked to his wife, and they struggled on towards the house.

Maurice met them in the doorway.

His face changed expression at sight of them.

Poverty was stamped in every line of their faces, in every shred of their wretched garments.

There was more than that: O'Malley's face had taken on the puffed and bruised appearance of the sot, and his breath stank as he spoke.

"Why, son, you've grown, to be sure—sprouted like a weed since I saw you, five years ago, ploughing the oat field."

And, pointing to his family behind him: "Here's the younger generation, sonny, and your own sister Ann. And how's the squire? We've been worried so about him. Better, say you? Well, now, that's good, to be sure. Annie, girl, your father's better; isn't that fine, now?"

Ann, who had lagged behind, had now rejoined her husband on the veranda.

She kissed Maurice and asked about her father.

Alice came running down the hallway from the kitchen and Mrs. Rodray emerged from her bedroom. George, who had been pulling lettuce for supper, saw the party on the veranda and came hurrying over from the garden, a large bunch of the tender green leaves in his hands.

When the greetings were over, George followed Alice into the kitchen.

The latter looked at the lettuce and said:

"That won't be half enough; you had better go for more."

The following day, Sunday, Maurice drove alone to church.

He arrived during the "Kyrie" and was the center of attention as he walked up the main

aisle to the Rodray pew, near the communion table.

After the service, he went to the sacristy to acquaint Father Nadeau with his father's condition.

On leaving the priest, he came around to the front of the church, where he came face to face with Elaine Le Blanc.

She was waiting her father, who had some business with the notary.

Their faces underwent a change as they met.

They appeared very different to each other, now, from the lad and the girl of the old days.

There was the merest interval of embarrassment.

Maurice was the first to speak:

"Why, Elaine, I would hardly have known you!"

He came nearer and held out his hand.

She was very charming, in her simple dress of softly tinted organdie.

The sun played in her glorious auburn hair.

She held a blue silk parasol at the tips of her white-gloved fingers, like a fairy queen, holding a wand.

They were man and woman now.

The border line had been crossed, and the sex in them had quickened into dangerous flame.

Little was said.

They fed upon each other's eyes.

There was an indefinite, subconscious struggle in their minds.

Their hearts were beating fast.

They felt that something strange and heretofore unknown to them was taking place within them.

The carriage of the Le Blancs appeared at the foot of the long walk.

"I shall be over after dinner," said Maurice.

"We shall be glad to have you," she replied, smiling, as she turned towards the waiting carriage.

Maurice found his father much improved.

He was now able to sit up in bed and talk in a low, uncertain voice.

"I am glad to have you home, Maurice," he said, with that simplicity which was characteristic of the man.

Maurice brought him a tumbler of cold water and arranged the pillows.

Then the father spoke again:

"My son, I may not be long for this world. Have you decided what you are going to do?"

"Not as yet, father. I hope to come to a decision soon."

"Well, go slowly, Maurice; don't leap in the dark."

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Baptiste Le Blanc was smoking his pipe on the front porch when Maurice drove up in front of the house.

"Ah, Monsieur Maurice!" exclaimed Baptiste, rising from his chair and coming forward to meet young Rodray. "I'm mighty glad you've come. Mamman and la Petite and myself, we've all been talking about you. Come into the house, Monsieur Maurice—walk right in. Sapristi! how he's filled out! I say, Mamman, what think you of him now?"

Mrs. Le Blanc greeted Maurice affectionately.

"Bless me, he's too big to kiss, now; my Baptiste would be jealous," she said, laughing heartily.

"No, I wouldn't," rejoined the man, good-naturedly; "kiss him if you want to, Mamman."

Elaine, who had been upstairs, entered the room at this moment.

Baptiste went out and returned presently with a bottle of his own vintage, and "Mam-man" cut into a big, frosted cake, in honor of the guest.

Then Maurice asked Elaine to go for a drive.

"Why, of course, she will go," broke in Baptiste, slapping his thigh. "How could she refuse her 'cavalier'?"

They turned off on the road to the Point, a pretty town on the edge of Lake Champlain.

The long, straight pike was shaded, the greater part of the way, with the overhanging branches of giant oaks and maples.

The dust lay very thick, and rose behind them like a cloud of yellow smoke.

Along the way the ditches and the roadbanks were hidden beneath an interminable stretch of elder bloom.

Large flocks of geese quacked spitefully, opened their bills and spread their wings.

Dogs came out from the farmhouses, barking indolently at the passing carriage, and retreated into the shade of the buildings.

The sun was very hot.

Not a leaf stirred.

Maurice and Elaine exchanged experiences of their lives away from home.

They chatted familiarly.

The strangeness of a few hours ago had entirely disappeared.

They were, once more, on the old footing of intimate friendship.

They drove through the little town on the American frontier and came, presently, to the lake.

It looked like a sea of glass, so transparent and motionless it was.

Out upon the blue water, white sails glimmered here and there, like the wings of great sea birds.

Along the beach, birds dipped their bills silently into the water and resought the grateful shelter of the woods that skirted the shore.

The heat was now crushing in its intensity.

"I am afraid to start back," said Maurice, "on account of the horse; he might go down under the heat. We can spread a robe under a tree in the woods and look out upon the lake. In a couple of hours the sun will weaken."

Elaine agreed readily to this, and the horse was tethered to a shady maple on the edge of the road.

They had retreated from the merciless heat of the beach into the shade of the woods.

Maurice fetched the robe and spread it upon the ground at the foot of a towering oak.

Here they seated themselves.

They sat for a long while watching the sails and the wide expanse beyond, where the sky seemed to bend and kiss the waters.

Maurice had taken Elaine's hand.

It lay in his, contented.

And now, a strong and sudden change came over him.

The blood shot to his head.

His heart beat wildly.

He wanted to fling aside this woman's hand that was burning him with a strange fire, the like of which he had never felt before.

He made a vain effort to rise, for he wished with all the strength left in him to rush away from her.

But the small white hand, lying there in his, held him.

She was gazing out upon the lake.

In the branches of a maple, near by, doves cooed.

The earth was dreaming.

The air was burthened with the wild and passionate song of love's awakening.

The scarlet sun was sinking into the western edge of the lake.

A delicious coolness was in the air.

The waters lapped the beach rocks fretfully.

The white sails rocked uneasily upon the troubled waters.

"Shall we go?" asked the woman, her arms about the neck of the man.

"Yes, dearest," he replied.

She drew him to her and held his face in both her hands.

Her great blue eyes filled with tears.

"Maurice, oh, Maurice!" she sobbed.

"Don't weep, dear heart," he said, and kissed her tenderly upon the lips.

A storm was hanging, black and ominous, in the sky, when they reached home.

Baptiste and Mamman Le Blanc were on the front porch.

"Ah, there they are at last!" exclaimed Baptiste. "Parbleu! I was beginning to fear the storm would overtake you."

CHAPTER NINE

Maurice went to his room without supper.

The storm broke with terrific fury, slamming the doors and rattling the windows.

Big guns boomed in the heavens and lurid flames danced in the blackness without, licking the tops of the drenched and bending trees.

Maurice locked the door and drew a chair over to the window.

He watched the storm.

The raging elements seemed strangely in accord with his own warring emotions.

What had he done?

Was this the end of his ambitions, the collapse of his "chateau en Espagne," the blasting of his hopes?

Had the act been of his volition?

Had he not resisted with what will-power he possessed?

Certainly his mind had had no part in the deed.

"But, Elaine—was he not answerable to her—he the stronger one?

Was she aware of the battle he had waged against the flesh?

Would she understand?

Could she forgive?

Or would she insist upon the performance to which she stood justly entitled?

What would his father say? his mother, the impetuous Baptiste—and Mamman Le Blanc—if it were known?

What would they think at the college—the professors and the scholars?

In fine, what was his duty?

Supposing his vocation to be the priesthood, which was the straight and honorable course of action now: to marry Elaine or forge ahead, weighted down by his sin, to the altar of the Eucharist?

He fell upon his knees by the side of the bed and buried his face in his arms.

He prayed long and fervently.

When he rose to his feet again, a round, white moon was staring into the room.

The sky was bright with the light of myriad stars.

Only, far to the north, a black strip of cloud was drifting hurriedly away.

There was a knock at the door.

Mrs. Rodray was there, her eyes bright and snapping, her flat bosom rising and falling rapidly.

Her hands were clasped over her stomach. She beckoned Maurice to follow.

They went downstairs to the dining-room.

Alice was setting a cold chicken on the table.

She locked both doors leading into the room and, going over to the sideboard, drew out a bottle of wine and placed it beside the fowl.

They ate in silence for some time.

Then, Mrs. Rodray, no longer able to contain herself, broke out:

"Well, what do you think, Maurice? We're saddled now, in earnest. They are come to stay, sure enough. You had no sooner left, after dinner, than O'Malley hitches up and drives down to the station. And what do you suppose he brought back in the wagon? two trunks, three cases and a valise. They've installed themselves in the spare bedroom and, to top it off, O'Malley went downtown, before the storm, and has just come home as drunk as

a lord! Oh, this is too much to bear, Maurice. Tell me, what are we going to do? Is there no way to get rid of them?"

"You would do well to let them have their visit out," replied Maurice, "for we must remember that Ann is one of ourselves. But, are you sure he was drunk?"

"He couldn't be any drunker and walk," said Alice.

"Well," rejoined Maurice, "let us wait a few days, till father is able to get about; then we'll leave it to him—he'll not fool with O'Malley."

"Another day like this," protested Mrs. Rodray, weakly, "might be the death of me. Oh, the disgrace of it! The drunken sot! Then, the children, shrieking at the top of their voices and galloping over the house, as if it was a barn. And Ann just laughs at them and says it's cute."

She took a sip of the wine and added: "Oh, my son, I'm building so on you! The day of your ordination will be the happiest of my life."

Maurice made no reply, but went back to his room as soon as he could take himself off.

He went to bed, but found it impossible to sleep.

The gray dawn was stealing through the window when he at last fell into a fitful doze.

The children, romping in the hallway, awoke him.

He dressed and went down to breakfast.

On the way to the dining-room, he stopped in to see his father.

The elder Rodray was sleeping.

The face had a slight flush and the deep lines were gone.

Maurice drew the blinds and tiptoed out of the room.

The others had eaten.

Maurice partook sparingly of eggs, toast and coffee.

Then he went over to the stables and saddled a horse.

He was passing out of the barn-yard when a sudden furore of cackling in the hen-house arrested his attention.

He left the horse standing and crossed the yard in the direction of the noise.

A hen flew over his shoulder as he went in.

In a far corner he saw a man bending over one of the nests.

On the floor, egg shells were scattered about.

Maurice kicked the wall lightly with his boot.

The man turned around abruptly.

It was O'Malley.

"Hello, there, Maurice," said he, affecting to be not the least disconcerted; "I'm sampling the eggs. I just suck 'em, you know. A hole here and a hole there and a pinch of salt and there you are! I can suck a dozen of 'em without stopping. And what makes them still better is a dash or two of the real stuff, whisky or brandy, with a little sugar to tone it down. My, oh, my, but you've got the fine eggs! As sweet as nuts and as big as your fist. Delicious, to be sure!"

Maurice turned on his heels and, walking over to the horse, leaped astride and rode away.

He had no intention of doing so before mounting, but a force stronger than himself turned him towards the lake.

The parched roads had already drunk up the rain.

The sun was out.

A cool breeze waved the green fields of oats and wheat and played in the foliage of the trees.

The Le Blanc house appeared deserted.

The blinds were drawn and no one was about.

He arrived at the lake about noon.

He tethered the horse to a tree and went down to the beach.

He was going over the events of the day before.

He climbed the slope and sought out the tree under which they had been together.

The grass was still trampled.

Something glittered on the ground at his feet.

He stooped down and picked it up.

It was Elaine's locket.

He opened it.

It contained two tintype photographs, one of Mamman, the other of Baptiste Le Blanc.

He closed the locket and turned to go.

Then he stopped short and his hand went to his throat: Elaine was coming through the glade to him.

She said but the one word: "Maurice!"

Then she threw her arms about his neck and gazed into his eyes.

"You should not have followed me," he said.
"It will be noticed and cause talk."

"Follow you?" she replied, withdrawing from him; "I came to look for my locket!"

He came over to her and took both her hands in his.

"You don't understand, Elaine," he said. "Believe me, I meant it for your good."

He drew her close to him and kissed her.

"Say you forgive me," he pleaded.

Elaine did not answer, but, looking up into his face, she smiled gladly, like a child, and sought the refuge of his lips again.

"How did you come?" he asked.

"I rode over on the white mare."

They sat down in the same spot.

Out upon the lake the waters rolled languidly.

A long string of coal barges moved lazily in the distance.

A great streamer of black smoke from the tug drifted slowly towards the west.

White sails flitted about, like butterflies.

The breeze from the lake came in playful gusts.

Elaine was gazing far away, where the sky seemed to bend and kiss the waters.

Maurice held her hand in his.

A young bird flew out over the edge of the lake and dropped, helpless, into the water.

The parent birds hovered over the fledgling, frantic and equally helpless.

Maurice thought he saw a reflection of himself in the tragedy.

He had ceased to resist.

It was late in the afternoon when they returned to Lasalle.

Baptiste, who was coming in from the fields, hailed them.

"Sapristi! Are we to see no more of you, Monsieur Maurice? It doesn't seem quite fair for 'la Petite' to keep you all to herself."

It had been his intention to go home without stopping, but now Maurice said:

"I shall be glad to take supper with you, if you say the word."

"Say the word? Parbleu! What need to say the word? You're as welcome as Elaine herself. Mamman was saying, no later than last night (and I agreed with her) that we should have more of your company."

When Maurice reached home, Mrs. Rodray and Alice were on the front porch.

The mother had been weeping.

"More trouble?" inquired Maurice, strangely irritated.

"O'Malley," said Alice.

"Drunk again," broke in the mother; "staggering, reeling. drunk."

And now Maurice took to spending most of the time with Elaine.

They took drives into the country.

They would leave early in the day and return late in the afternoon or at night.

Mrs. Rodray and Mamman Le Blanc prepared lunches for the pair, and Baptiste would add a bottle of his gooseberry wine, for good luck, as he would say.

Maurice was no longer troubled with scruples as to his conduct or its consequences.

He went about, eating and drinking, as if nothing unusual had taken place in his life.

He slept soundly and continued to rise late.

The elder Rodray was now up and about.

He was quite feeble, as yet, and contented himself with short walks in the garden or in the fields.

Sometimes he sat in his armchair under a tree in the orchard.

He had changed greatly of late, and his man-

ner was more that of a timid guest than of the owner of the estate.

His walk was shaky and uncertain.

His hair was now very white.

One morning Maurice was on his way to the stables when his father hailed him from the potato field nearby. He was knocking bugs off the vines with his cane.

"Maurice," he said, "have you made any plans for your future, as yet?"

"None other, for the present, than to take 'Philosophy' and complete the course."

"Ah!"

There was a moment's silence.

William Rodray picked a large bug off a leaf and placed it carefully upon a small flat stone at his feet.

Then he crushed it with his boot.

"And the Le Blanc girl," he continued, pursuing a well-defined line of thought; "what are your intentions as to her? I am your father. I have a right to know the truth.

Maurice went white.

A sudden weakness struck him in the knees and began to mount to his head.

But he fought it off and replied:

"You have no reason to believe that my intentions are anything but honorable."

"You are right, my son, and I pray God it may always be so."

Then, after an interval, he added:

"But, I warn you, if you must be a priest, be a good one."

CHAPTER TEN.

"You see," said O'Malley to Ann, when they had been in Lasalle a few days, "it's like this, Annie dear: The squire's not long for this world, and for the while that remains for him on earth, he's as good as dead, so far as work's concerned. Then there's Maurice, who's going back to college in September; and George, who thinks he's got to go too. They sent for us, you know—don't forget that—they telegraphed for us, and here we are, by Harry, boots and all! And all you've got to do is to say so, Annie (as you're a daughter of the house), and we'll stay till it suits us to leave."

"It's the black looks, Hugh, that I can't take," said Ann. "The food gags me."

"Damn their black looks, Annie girl. Not a one of them had a hand in the making of the money but the squire, as I understand, and he's not objecting, is he? Leastways, I haven't heard of it, if he is. And, besides, there's

plenty of work to be done about the place that will pay handsomely for the keep of the lot of us. Now, why can't I do the work as well as a stranger, who'd steal them blind?"

"I think it's the drink, Hugh, that they're objecting to more than anything else. You see, this college business seems to have made them mighty uppish, as compared to how they used to be when I was a girl at home. And, besides, you know it's wrong. Here I am without a stitch of decent clothing to my back. And the children in tatters. Oh, if you'd only straighten up, Hugh, we could get along well enough without my people. When I think of the one that's coming, and not a penny to our name, I wish that I was dead!"

"Well, well, now, don't work yourself up over it. Who knows what may happen betwixt now and then? Don't take on so. Worry's an old lodger; but, for all the time he's been on earth and meddling with people's business, I don't know of a single good deed to his credit. There's a fact, to be sure! Cheer up, Annie girl, and take my advice—hold a stiffer upper lip! I'll see the squire and have a talk with him when he gets out again."

O'Malley had taken advantage of the elder Rodray's illness to edge in on the work of the farm and the chores about the house.

None of the family objected to this at first; in fact, they felt grateful to O'Malley for these services, especially George, who was lazy and who was held responsible for the work by the father.

But O'Malley didn't stop at the daily routine of the farm.

With hammer and saw, he went about doing odd jobs here and there over the place; or, again, he would be seen going towards the barns with a paint pot in his hand and a ladder under his arm.

He was not long in Lasalle when he began to assume an air of grave responsibility in all matters pertaining to the farm.

George now took charge of the store, where there was less to do.

O'Malley worked and managed the farm.

And when the elder Rodray left his bed and walked about the grounds, O'Malley said not a word, but kept on with his chores and his labors, as if this had always been his occupation.

At night he went down to the village inn.
He usually came home late and drunk.

But he took jealous care not to let liquor interfere with his work.

The day finally drew near for the harvest.
It was Sunday.

The mowers and threshers were at Le Blanc's, where another day's work remained to be done.

Tuesday they would start in at Rodray's.

William Rodray was walking slowly around the edge of the wheatfield, looking over the crop.

He had stooped to examine an ear of wheat, when he heard a swishing sound in the grass behind him.

It was O'Malley.

The latter had been waiting this opportunity for several days.

He had seen the older man leave the house and followed him.

He lost no time in preamble, but came straight to the point:

"I've been wanting to have a little private talk with you, Squire," he began.

"Very well, Hugh."

"About the work here on the farm. I thought we might be able to strike a bargain. I'd do the work, or some of it, and see to the doing of the rest."

"And how much do you expect for your services?"

"Well, Squire, I hadn't got that far. I wanted to see what you thought of it first."

"How much have you been making, Hugh?"

"All the way from nine to twelve dollars a week."

"When did you take to drinking?"

"Drinking? Why, I've taken a little sup all my life."

"You did not say so when you asked me for my daughter. She's in rags, Hugh, and so are your little ones. Do you purpose to keep this up? If so, I wouldn't have you here at any price."

"Why, no, Squire; the fact is, I've been a little down in my luck of late and drifted in with the boys, which was wrong in me, to be sure, but it's not habitual, Squire, I can assure you that."

"Well," said Rodray, "I'll think the matter over and see what I can do. In the meantime,

say not a word about this to the family; you understand?"

O'Malley crossed the road and let down the bars for the cows.

They rushed out, mooing, their bulging udders swinging from side to side.

O'Malley put up the bars again to keep in the horses.

Then he caught up with the cows.

William Rodray gazed after his son-in-law, as the latter swung his long whip over the backs of the laggards.

And when the herd and the man had climbed the hill in the road and disappeared in the valley beyond, he turned back to the field and scanned the yellow wheat that waved golden in the sunlight.

"It's as good as settled, Annie dear," said O'Malley to his wife, when they were alone in their room that night. "I got your father's ear. Ah, girl, it's myself that played trumps to-day, to be sure! I've got it fixed now, that I know. It's a secret betwixt me and the squire. But I will tell you this: Sleep easy and eat hearty, for all's well and the danger's past!"

Ann stared at her lord, a smile of incredulity playing about her lips.

He noted her humor.

He looked serious for a moment. Then he turned upon her and said:

"What are you grinning at? Do you think I'm drunk?"

"No," she replied, "I know you're not. But, did you really get around the governor?"

"To be sure I did, girl, or I wouldn't be wasting my breath telling you."

The harvesters came on Tuesday.

For four days the Rodray homestead was the scene of much activity.

O'Malley spent the days with the hands and gave glowing accounts to William Rodray of his work a-field.

He remained sober and took his drink judiciously from a stone jug which he had hidden in the hay loft.

At night he retired, virtuously, after supper, together with Ann and the children.

He understood that he must convince his father-in-law of his reformation.

Henceforth he would not go to the village tavern.

He could easily drive over to the Point and have his jug filled.

None would be the wiser.

Alice and Mrs. Rodray were busy with the wedding trousseau, for the day was drawing near.

Maurice was head over heels in love with Elaine.

And Elaine returned his love with a great, unsparing devotion.

They were rarely apart; but little was thought of it by the neighbors, who knew of their life-long attachment.

Mrs. Rodray grieved over her son's preference for the French girl, as she used to call Elaine, but said naught of her chagrin to Maurice, whom she was growing daily more loath to displease.

She bore this part of her burden in silence, confining her expressions of displeasure to the O'Malleys, who seemed to have taken root in the homestead.

O'Malley was taking a lively interest in the affairs of the farm.

He did not hesitate, upon occasion, to voice his mind openly at the table or in the councils

of the family as to what he thought should or should not be done about the place.

The conciliating tone and manner of the earlier days of his stay at Lasalle had given way to a more peremptory, almost authoritative, bearing.

Mrs. Rodray attempted to lay the matter before her husband.

But he turned away from her, without a word, and left the room.

Emulating the example set by O'Malley, Ann now went about the house, making the beds, carrying slops or performing sundry tasks in the dining-room and kitchen.

This, in a measure, conciliated the mother, who looked forward to the coming loss of Alice with a feeling akin to trepidation.

But O'Malley was too much for her to endure.

Her skin crept at sight of this cheeky, ill-mannered fellow. She was never the first to speak.

And she answered him in the briefest possible words.

Not in the least abashed, O'Malley went about his business much the same as though she had never been in Lasalle.

The wedding came at last.

It was a quiet affair.

Francois Grégoire looked quite tragic in a black "Prince Albert" suit.

He wore a white rose "boutonnière" and his black, wavy hair was resplendent with strongly-scented oil.

He walked like one in a dream, and his face was white.

On his way to the altar, his foot caught in the carpet and he stumbled.

Some one in a pew giggled.

Alice, who had his arm, turned very red.

All Lasalle was at its doors to see the bridal couple returning from the church.

Alice made a beautiful bride.

She was dressed in a white gown with a long train and wore a wreath of orange blossoms.

She carried a large bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley which Ann had gathered on the edge of the garden.

There were seven carriages.

Tiny, white silk ribbons fluttered on the whips.

The coachmen all seemed alive to the importance of the occasion.

They bore themselves erect on the boxes and looked straight ahead.

The sun smiled down upon Lasalle.

The housewives, in their doorways, said:

"What a day for a wedding!"

A great feast was laid.

And when they had eaten and drunk their fill, the guests drove back to their homes, and the bride and groom set out upon their wedding journey.

The time was now approaching for Maurice to leave Lasalle.

Elaine counted the days that remained with a feeling of vague, indefinable dread.

She had hoped he would abandon the idea of going back to college; the more so now that the elder Rodray was no longer able to work.

She had even hoped to become his bride in the fall.

For he had told her, in his transports of passion, of the great, undying love which he bore her.

She dared not question him.

For the subject was painful to her.

And even to think of the coming separation sent the tears welling to her eyes and her heart beating wildly.

She hoped against hope that he would not go; that something would happen to keep him with her.

And, with the buoyancy of youth, she would pass, of a sudden, from the verge of tears to liquid ripples of laughter, seeing as she did, in this feeble ray of hope, the possibility of continued happiness.

But Maurice, who had given no thought to consequences, and saw no obstacle in his way, had not considered Elaine or the complications that might arise from their "liaison."

His love was the love of the butterfly for the flower.

When away from her, his thoughts, his aspirations ran to his future with increasing force and fever.

On the eve of his return to college, he was with Elaine far into the night.

When Baptiste and Mamman had gone to bed, they went out in the moonlight.

They walked, arm in arm, through the fields of yellow stubble.

Pumpkins stood out red in the pale sheen, and upon the fence rails a silvery rime was gathering that gave to the fields the semblance of pastoral paintings in frames of crystal.

Leaving the fields behind them, they wandered over to the edge of the woods and followed the winding pathway that led to the river.

There was a fallen tree, an oak that had been struck down by lightning, upon the bank of the stream. A great rift had been torn in the trunk and the bark was blackened and charred in patches.

They seated themselves in silent accord and gazed upon the water.

Each was strangely preoccupied.

Neither found words for speech.

The night air was cold.

Elaine huddled up to Maurice, and he placed his arm tenderly round her waist.

They sat there a long while, not speaking.

Sometimes he would press her hand.

Sometimes he would draw her lips to his and kiss them.

But her eyes welled up each time, and he became strangely affected, as though some one very dear to him were about to die.

And when they walked back over the winding path that skirted the woods and through the fields of yellow stubble to the house of the Le Blancs, and when they gazed into each other's eyes for the last time, it was in silence still, save a sob that broke from the lips of Elaine.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

The students' annual retreat was held late in September.

It lasted a week.

This retreat consisted of a series of sermons and religious exercises, and had for end the invocation of Providence upon the labors of the students during the year just beginning.

It was during this week of prayer and meditation that Maurice Rodray thought, at last, that his vocation was discovered to him.

A great light burst in upon him; and he trembled at thought of his unworthiness.

What would the vow of chastity mean, coming from him now?

Yet, he heard the call distinctly.

There could be no mistake.

But, there was an obstacle.

It stood before him, silent, immovable.

Do what he would, he might not argue it aside.

And, what was worse, it was of his own doing.

But, oh, the throbbing at his heart!

And the voice in the tabernacle, calling to him!

And Christ, leading the way with his cross, proclaiming all sins forgiven.

The retreat was preached by a young priest of the order of "the most Holy Saviour."

He was a man of passionate eloquence.

It was towards the end of the week that Maurice, after much hesitation, found himself alone with Father Van der Pflave, in the room of the latter.

The priest was a nervous, wiry little man, with piercing black eyes and ever restless arms.

He had a way of swinging his hands over his head, as he spoke, or throwing them out before him, like one swimming.

He was seldom still for a moment.

A dynamo of untiring energy.

He would change from laughter to deeper moods with all the swiftness of a cat.

He was essentially happy in his calling.

And the great joy he found therein lit up his thin, ascetic face with a beatific smile.

A sudden allusion to the sufferings of Christ for mankind would brim his eyes with tears.

He was an enthusiast of the Cross.

The young missionary made a profound impression on Maurice.

It was due to him that the clouds seemed about to dissipate on the horizon of his life.

Van der Pflave made it clear to Maurice that if he felt called to the priesthood, it was his duty to respond to the call without hesitation: "Unhappy the man," he said many times, "who loses his vocation!"

"How would you like to become one of us?" he asked Maurice: "A Salvatorist; a preacher of the word; a saviour of souls?"

Maurice had not thought of this before.

But he caught the priest's question eagerly and asked Van der Pflave about the life of the missionaries.

The priest spoke glowingly of his order and assured Maurice that he had every outward mark of the calling.

"You could leave here in a week or two; that is, as soon as we could communicate with the Father Provincial. Then, when your adieux were made, you would take ship for Belgium.

You would make your novitiate, and complete your studies in our convent at Saint Trond: For we have no 'studentat' in Canada. You would see the world; round out your education; and, upon receiving Holy Orders, come back to us, a priest, a full-fledged soldier of the Cross."

"I would gladly go," rejoined Maurice; "but I fear that I am too unworthy."

"You have in mind your sin, mon ami. Now tell me, how could you hope to better atone for the past than by giving your life to God and His holy service? And, besides, you should not forget that the mercy of God is greater than any sin of man. Can He not do for you what He did for Saint Augustine, who had been a libertine, Saint Ignatius, who had lived the life of a worldling, the Abbé de Rancy, a free and easy courtier, and countless numbers of others, who harkened to the call? Sleep on it, tonight, mon ami; and come to me tomorrow, after Mass. Pray the Blessed Virgin for guidance, and your good guardian angel. I will say a Mass to the same end. Au revoir!"

Maurice went to the chapel and knelt before the "Mater Dolorosa."

There was no longer any doubt in his mind.
But, Elaine—what about that?

Then the words of Van der Pflave recurred to him: "The mercy of God is greater than any sin of man."

There must be a decision somewhere: he would be a priest!

This settled, he wrote a long letter to the elder Rodrays, in which he spoke at length of his great happiness.

Too, he wrote to Elaine; but the tone of his letter to her differed from that of the other.

It was a duty thrust suddenly upon him, he told her—a stern, irrevocable decree which he must not and dared not resist.

The letters written, Maurice locked them in his desk and went to find Van der Pflave.

The latter was reading his breviary on the promenade.

"I will go to Belgium," said Maurice to the priest; "I know it is my calling."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Van der Pflave, closing his book, and putting his arm round the other's neck: "I thank the good God who heard my prayer. Deo gratias!"

CHAPTER TWELVE.

The Father Provincial of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour was then in Quebec.

He replied promptly to Van der Pflave's letter, authorizing him to make arrangements with the steamship company for young Rodray's passage.

The "Dominion of Canada" was to sail in three days.

It was decided he would complete his preparations and settle his affairs, to leave on that date.

He concluded not to go to Lasalle. His people could as easily come to see him off. This would lessen the pangs of parting.

Mrs. Rodray came at once, upon receipt of the telegram from Maurice.

There was an affecting scene between mother and son.

Mrs. Rodray gazed long and tenderly at

Maurice, who seemed to have taken on an air of deep filial affection and humility.

"Ah, my son," she assured him, the tears coursing down her thin face, "this repays me for the past. This is the heavenly reward for all my trials and sufferings. God is just! God is just!"

And then: "Your father cannot come. The wicked man is struck down again in this hour of his son's triumph. The doctors say he will recover; but that he will never regain his health completely. Ah, God is just!"

Alice and Francois came on the last day.

The O'Malleys remained at home.

Maurice paid a farewell visit to Mary, at the Hotel Dieu.

The latter was very happy in her vocation.

She was proud of her brother, and introduced him to the Mother Superioress.

The main deck was crowded when the Rod-ray party went aboard ship.

The night air was laden with the perfume of flowers.

Blasé men and beautiful women stood in groups, chatting.

Sometimes, a peal of laughter rang out.

But it seemed strangely out of tune, here.

It told too plainly of tears forced back and held in check; of hearts wrung with anguish; of souls that must defy their feelings, else weep.

The scene bewildered Maurice.

Francois assisted him to his cabin with his luggage.

The women waited on deck.

When the men returned, Maurice went up to his mother and kissed her; then he kissed Alice and gave Francois and George his hand.

In the twinkling of an eye, he had gone below.

Francois led the women down the gang-way, onto the wharf.

They were weeping.

When Maurice awoke, the daylight was streaming in through the port-hole and the ship throbbed like a living thing.

A man came into the cabin.

He was tall and boney. He wore a Norfolk suit of gray tweed and a cap of the same material.

"Good morning, sir," said the stranger.

"I'm your cabin mate for the voyage. You're a late sleeper, I see."

"Have we started?" asked Maurice.

"Started?" rejoined the man, looking at his watch. "We've left Montreal some forty miles behind us."

Maurice dressed and went on deck.

A few men and women were exercising.

Others leaned over the railing and watched the fleeting shores.

Some were seated on long, frail-looking steamer chairs, reading or chatting.

They all appeared very much at home.

Maurice saw a stout, bearded man, in a uniform of blue and gold, talking to a tall, dark woman, in a heavy cape of Scotch plaid.

He judged the man to be the ship's captain.

The woman glanced at him and as their eyes met, Maurice felt a strange dislike for her, though he had never seen her before.

He dropped his eyes and crossed the deck to the guard-rail.

The trees along the shore of the river were black and leafless.

The grass was dead on the banks; the fields stripped of their yield.

The air was damp and raw.

No one spoke to Maurice.

Lasalle came back to him.

He thought of Elaine. The life he was about to take up appeared, for the first time, beset with possible disaster for him.

A feeling of intense loneliness came over him; and he longed for the embraces of Elaine.

The breakfast gong recalled him.

He was assigned to the captain's table.

By his side sat the dark woman whom he had seen conversing with the chief officer.

A faint perfume was exhaled from the woman; an indefinable, exotic odor, as of delicate flowers, that might have been borne in upon warm winds from distant shores.

They passed the old French cities of Sorel and Trois Rivières and the sun was setting over Quebec as the ship sailed past the Citadel on her way to the sea.

In the Gulf the sea was rough and choppy.

The third day out Maurice, who was badly shaken up, remained in his cabin.

It was late in the afternoon when the door opened and the ship's doctor entered, followed by the dark woman in the plaid cape.

She came over to his berth and placed her hand upon his forehead.

"Poor boy!" she murmured, tenderly. "You must try to come on deck, tomorrow. You have to fight it off, you know."

Then she rang for the steward and ordered a pint of Clicquot.

She poured the sparkling liquor into a thick glass tumbler and gave it to Maurice:

"I am a good sailor," said she, turning to the doctor. "I know pretty well what they need."

"I shall send you something to read," she continued, addressing Maurice. "You like adventure?"

"Yes, very much," he replied: "and—thank you a thousand times!"

As she turned to go, she smiled upon the sick man and Maurice saw that she was beautiful.

The following day she came again.

With her was the captain, who inquired, in a blustering way, after the health of Maurice.

It struck the latter that the chief officer had come to see him merely to be in the company of the woman. And he was surprised to feel a

pang of jealousy at thought of this old man's conceit.

The next day she came alone.

But Rodray's cabin mate was lying in his berth.

So, she handed him Flaubert's "Madame Bovary" and another bottle of Clicquot; and went away.

She did not come again.

And they were in mid-ocean before Maurice felt well enough to go on deck.

They were fighting a heavy sea and the ship lurched and rolled in a manner that made all look to their sea legs.

A steward assisted Maurice to a chair on the starboard deck.

A stiff, cold wind stung his face.

The movement of the ship struck the pit of his stomach.

He came to his feet quickly in an effort to get to the guard-rail.

At this moment a great wave struck the vessel and she went rolling over, a heavy spray dashing the deck.

Maurice felt a hand grasp his arm, and, turning, beheld his visitor by his side.

"Go back," he said; "it's dangerous."

"Not at all," she replied, pulling a red tam o' shanter well down over her wealth of raven hair. "I love the sea and have no fear of its dangers."

She held his arm in hers as though he were a child of tender years and led him around to larboard, where the wind was warded off by a tarpaulin, which had been stretched over the deck, in roof-and-wall fashion.

They seated themselves on long steamer chairs and a steward fetched rugs from the woman's cabin, in which they wrapped themselves.

Their chairs touched.

Maurice could feel the heat of the woman's arm against his.

He tingled with a strange emotion; but thought instantly of his calling and turned a deaf ear to the rumbling of his blood which pounded madly at his temples.

Then he heard her voice, riding the wind, like the tinkling of a bell.

He turned his face to hers.

Her cheeks were flushed and the background was like the transparent white of Carrara.

Her eyes were black and of the softness of velvet; the lashes long and thick, like an Egyptian's.

Her teeth were white and flawless.

Her ears pink, like coral.

Her bosom rose and fell in rhythmic cadence.

Maurice had never seen a woman like her.

She was laughing now, and looking into his eyes.

"Is my patient better?" she was saying.

And, with a sickening throbbing at his heart, he replied:

"Yes, yes, I feel much improved."

A volume slid from her lap and fell upon the deck.

Maurice picked it up and handed it to her.

Their hands met and his cheeks flushed perceptibly.

For a moment her hand lay in his.

Then, starting up, she said:

"You are feverish; let me send for the doctor."

"No, no," he protested. "I am doing splendidly; I am much better than I was."

She looked at him in silence for some time. Then she asked:

"Where are you going?"

"To Belgium; to study."

"Art?"

"No—theology."

"Oh!"

She gazed down upon the deck for what seemed a long while to Maurice.

Then she spoke again:

"Are you going to be a minister?"

"No—a priest. I am a Catholic."

He glanced at her; and he noted that her face had undergone a change.

Her cheeks had paled and her eyes dimmed in thought.

At this moment the captain came up and drew a chair beside them.

He was in very good humor and predicted a fall in the wind and a smooth sea for the remainder of the voyage.

That night, in his berth, Maurice was a prey to whirling thoughts.

He rolled and tossed and found it impossible to sleep.

And among the shadows that crept in upon his restless soul were the dark woman and the captain.

And he himself gave the matter some thought, and stopped for a moment in his dream fever, to wonder why he felt so deep a hatred for this old fool with a grandfather's beard.

His heart beat loudly and his ears sang.

Many lewd and awful images flashed before his waking eyes as though clothed in garments of flesh.

And always it was he and the dark woman together.

He thought no longer of the convent in Saint Trond; of Van der Pflave, of Elaine.

It was the woman, the dark woman, now; he did not even know her name—oh, God, only to possess that woman!

On the morrow she did not appear on deck.

Nor the next day.

The third day a steward brought him a note from her. It read:

"Come. Cabin 89. Valdetta Bergère."

He followed the steward, who led him to the door of the cabin.

He went in without knocking.

Valdetta was lying in her berth.

She was paled, like a flower that has suffered from the caresses of the sun.

But Maurice thought she was very lovely.
And he trembled before her.

"I didn't expect to have to send for you," she said. "I went to see you when you were ill."

"I did come," he rejoined. "And I was about to knock on the door when I heard the voice of a man—the captain's voice—and I went back."

"Oh, the captain! That old fossil; why didn't you come in? You are going to become a priest. You need have no fear of women. You are of the anointed. Will you please press the button? And order a quart of Clicquot and glasses. You can sit on the edge of my berth. Right here, near me—that's it. Now tell me about all the souls you are going to save—you interest me so! You don't know? Well, let us talk about something else. Have you ever been in love? No? I have often wondered if priests were things of bone and flesh, like ourselves, or mere spirits in outward forms of men, and free of human frailties and base passions. Now, here is the story of Manon Lescault: I have read it many times. The author, who was a priest—"

"My God!" exclaimed Maurice. "You are driving me mad. I love you; I love you with all my soul!"

He flung himself upon her in the delirium of his passion.

But she pushed him back gently, like a mother refusing her babe the breast.

"The steward!" she said softly in his ear. "He's at the door with the wine!"

When the champagne was drunk Valdetta said:

"Will you be honest if I ask you a question?"

"Yes."

"You didn't like me at first, did you?"

"No."

"That's a good boy. Now you must go on deck and let the sea breezes cool that 'grande passion' of yours. For I would never consent to being the cause of your remorse in the cold corridors of a cloister."

"At least," said he, "let me kiss your hand."

"No, no," she laughed; and her silvery, mellow voice rang out above the plashing of the waves.

"Then, why this note—why did you send for me?"

"I have already told you, my dear. Really, you are very interesting to me. Now, go, please; that's a good boy—au revoir!"

Maurice went on deck, his soul racked with regrets.

Why had he ever told her the truth about his destination, his calling?

What had come over him to admit he had not fancied her at first sight?

And his vocation—was there really such a thing?

Or was it not more like a chimerical moth that must take flame and perish wretchedly at slightest contact with the fires of passion?

Was it too late?

Could he turn back?

Or must he go forward into the life he had chosen?

He thought again, as in the old days in college, of the mysticism of the Word and the glory of the latter-day prophet.

But, now, these were dimmed and undesirable; and a woman of dazzling grace and splendor was beckoning him to follow back over the wastes, to a realm of more sentient joys, where love lingered.

His flesh thrilled.

Then the priesthood, black-robed, passed before him.

He thought of the vow of chastity, which must endure while life was.

Again he saw himself in the pulpit, converting multitudes, the revered of the faithful: Father Rodray—the name would be on the lips of thousands; would be lisped by the tongues of infants.

Then, he knew she would not listen to him, now. The woman in "89."

And, even if she would, the disgrace—he could never return to Lasalle; nor appeal to his father for aid.

He was as helpless as a bird unfledged.

He went below to his cabin; and was glad to find no one there.

He rang for the steward and ordered a bottle of Clicquot.

He had never drank this wine before; but now it had a peculiar charm for him.

He inhaled the intoxicating perfume of it, before drinking, as though it might be the hot breath of his beloved.

He drank deep.

The steward smiled when he called for the second quart.

And when Maurice ordered another bottle of the champagne, the man merely nodded and withdrew—but he was too good a servant to obey.

The next day passed; and the next; and he did not see Valdetto.

And on the following morning they sighted the coast of Ireland.

The grim, gray rocks rose out of the sea, flanking the green fields and defying the waves.

Mediæval castles sentineled the topmost heights, battered by time and tempest, and deserted by men.

White clouds of gulls rose above the cliffs and descended into their nesting places, among ravines.

Maurice stood at the guard-rail, watching the panorama of green and gray as it unfolded before him.

The ship trailed along very close to the shore.

At times they could see the Irish farmers emerge from their little white houses and go towards the barns.

Maurice even saw the smoke rise from a man's pipe, as he stood on the edge of a cliff and waved at the ship. Maurice waved back at the fellow.

He even wished, at that moment, that he had been born upon the isle, so that he might feel the pangs of the evicted, and know the impulse to fight for the cause—for his father had told him much of the sufferings and the oppression of Ireland.

The ship took on her pilot at Moville.

Slowly the coast of Ireland grew gray and indistinct and finally, late in the day, was but a shadowy outline against the sky.

The Isle of Man went by and, at nightfall, the ship dropped anchor at the bar of Liverpool.

There was much merriment aboard.

A concert was given for the relief of sailors' orphans.

Maurice remained on deck.

The waters played about the great seafarer, and a round, blood-red moon was up.

Here on the threshold of the old world, Maurice repented his haste and trembled at the enormity of the undertaking before him.

Too, he was consumed with a great desire, a mad, unreasoning passion for this woman who had so strangely entered into his life.

Gulls swooped and skimmed over the sea, emitting their shrill, weird cries.

The ship rolled drowsily, like a cradle.

He thought of Elaine, of the Rodrays who were keenly proud of him, the eldest son.

And now it came in upon him that the love of Elaine was a great, burning love—a flame of exquisite purity that would not, in time, consume itself and flicker out; but must endure while life was, and would not chill until the heart was dead.

And in this moment he pitied Elaine, as we are prone to pity those who love us and whose love we cannot return.

He had not seen Valdetta since the day of his dismissal.

He had watched and waited for her constantly; but she did not appear on deck.

He saw her in the forms of others who did not in the least resemble her.

He conceived a genuine hatred for a pussy old woman who took Valdetta's seat at table while the latter was ill in her cabin.

He scowled villainously; and the offense was not repeated.

He drank large quantities of Clicquot, because she was fond of the wine.

And now that the hour of parting was near, he realized what a great void must come into his life when she had gone.

It was well on in the forenoon of the following day when the "Dominion of Canada" slipped into her dock.

Maurice was standing near the forecastle, watching the sailors, when Valdetta emerged from the hatchway and came toward him.

She wore a trim travelling suit of dark material.

Her face was pale and somewhat thoughtful.

"Ah, Monsieur Rodray, I suppose you will be flitting away on the first train to your beloved retreat?"

"I had counted on seeing London," he replied. "But now—"

"But now? Go on, I pray!"

"You know what I told you the day I made such a fool of myself in your cabin—well, that's it. I don't care what becomes of me if I am not to have you."

"Poor boy, it's but a fleeting fancy, I assure you—a fleeting fancy. I shall go to see you in your convent some day; and I will wager that you will not receive me, so taken up will you be with your devotions. Do you take me up?"

"Yes, by the God above me!"

"Good. Ah, they are hoisting the gangway. I am glad it's over."

They passed off the ship onto the slanting gangplank, Maurice holding Valdettes arm in his.

A crowd was gathered on the dock.

A large, fierce-looking man detached himself from the mass and, coming forward to Valdettes, clasped her in his arms and kissed her repeatedly on the mouth.

Then he turned to Maurice and said:

"Thank you, sir—and a very good day to you."

And now they were gone.

And Maurice felt very much alone and abandoned in the midst of this howling Babel of carters and cabbies and half-naked urchins.

He wandered about the thoroughfares until noon.

The Continental express for Harwich had just started to move, as he swung onto the foot-board and scrambled into his compartment.

The night had settled thick and black when the train pulled into the old English seaport.

The night steamer for Antwerp was due to leave within the hour.

Maurice lost no time, but went aboard.

He walked down a long, double line of little white doors with brass knobs, until he came to his cabin.

He crawled into his berth and directly fell asleep.

They were in the waters of the Scheld when he awoke; and it was day.

In the distance, the Cathedral tower rose grim and stolid against a background of spotless sky.

A priest of the order met him at the dock.

"You are welcome, my dear brother," he said simply, taking Maurice by the hand. And he led him to a waiting carriage.

They drove to the Antwerp convent of the Salvatorists.

Maurice was warmly welcomed by the priests.

Meat was laid; and a large stone jug of beer took up its place upon the table.

Maurice fell to and ate heartily.

The day was spent viewing the masterpieces of the Flemish painters and in the Zoological Gardens.

In the evening he boarded the train for Saint Trond, where he arrived after an hour's journey.

Another priest of the order was at the station to meet him. He was a young man, slight of frame and of pleasant manner.

"I presume this is the dear Brother Rodray?" he inquired, coming up to Maurice.

"Yes, Father," replied the latter.

And they turned from the tracks which had brought him from over the world, to the old convent city, now indistinct in the gathering shades of night.

They walked through winding streets for some time, and finally came to a high brick wall which rose higher at a certain point and took on the dignity of a facade.

There was a door.

And over the door, the statue of the founder of the order.

At the foot of the statue ran the inscription in Latin: "Peace to all who enter here."

The priest spoke.

He, too, was young and knew the sacrifice.

"My dear friend, is there anything you would care to do while you are still free?"

"No, Father."

The priest turned to the door.

A gong from within clanged harshly.

An old lay brother opened the door.

For an instant, Maurice Rodray glanced back into the dark, deserted street.

Then he went forward and the door closed softly behind him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

When Elaine received the letter from Maurice, in which he told her of his decision to enter the Order of the Salvatorists, a hollow moan escaped her.

Her head whirled and sang; and her heart throbbed so that it sickened her.

The walls of her room, whither she had retired to read his letter, swam round and round; and a death-like weakness overcame her.

She reeled to the bed and fell heavily upon it.

Pain flitted from her; and she sank into a deep, merciful sleep.

When she awoke, Mamman was standing beside her.

Elaine thought of the letter.

She cast a swift glance over the floor; but it was not there.

"The letter? Here it is, my dear," said Mamman.

Then, after a silence, she turned from the window, through which she could see the ga-bled homestead of the Rodrays, and said, more to herself than to Elaine:

“And so, he’s going to be a priest!”

At this, Elaine sank back upon the bed and buried her face in the pillows.

And now, no longer able to restrain her grief, she sobbed pitifully.

Mamman knelt down beside her and stroked her hand.

“Bless the child,” she was saying. “It’s very hard. But you mustn’t take on so. For there are many others as good as he. The voice of Baptiste recalled them.

“I say, Maman, when will supper be ready?”

“It’s ready now, Baptiste, only for setting the table. I’m coming.”

Elaine did not come down to supper.

Mamman told Baptiste of the letter and its contents, over their soup.

“Going to become a priest, say you, Mamman? Does he say he is going to be a priest?”

“Yes, a priest—a Salvatorist.”

“And you say he’s going to the old country—I mean, does he say that in his letter?”

"Yes, Baptiste—to Belgium, to enter /the novitiate."

"And when does he sail, Mamman?"

"I believe he says on the twenty-seventh of this month."

"And what day of the week will that be?"

"Saturday."

"Saturday, the twenty-seventh," he repeated to himself, rising from the table.

"Why, Baptiste, I thought you were hungry; you haven't eaten anything!"

He came over to Mamman and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

"Mamman, something's wrong. I can feel it. I know it. Else, why should 'la Petite' take it to heart as you say she does? Then, why didn't he come back to Lasalle to make his adieux? I tell you there's something wrong; and don't mistake me!"

A thought struck him suddenly.

His tone changed and a deadly glint flashed in his eye.

"I will go to Montreal—"

"Why, Baptiste," broke in Mamman, rising from her chair, "what would you be doing in Montreal?"

"I will go to Montreal," he repeated doggedly; "I will meet him face to face, before he sails; I will have the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"He will tell me, yes or no, whether harm has come to 'la Petite'—that's what I mean."

Baptiste made good his word and went to Montreal to see Maurice.

But it was late in the forenoon when he reached the dock; and the ship was well under way.

He returned to Lasalle, morose, crestfallen and strongly convinced that his suspicions were true.

He spoke no more about the matter.

In fact he turned very glum and had little to say in or out of the house.

Only, he showed an increasing tenderness for Elaine.

Not that he spoke more to her.

But he became very mindful of her comfort and saved her many steps, by anticipation, in her work about the house.

Suddenly, he left off going to the village or to church.

He took to roaming the woods and fields.

Sometimes he would leave home in the morning and not return until late at night.

He would come in bespattered with mud and filth and covered with burrs.

Mamman, who had noted the change in him, would greet him kindly and lay his supper.

He would snatch a bite or two from the table without sitting down.

He would remove his big, heavy boots and tiptoe his way up the stairs, candle in hand, to Elaine's room.

He would place his ear to the keyhole and listen.

Then he would turn the knob softly, like a thief, and steal up to her bed.

Gently, tenderly, he would tuck the coverings under the feet and shoulders of the sleeping girl and creep away to his room as softly as he had come.

When Mamman came to bed, she found him sleeping deeply, like a tired child.

She was always careful not to wake him.

For she was beginning to fear Baptiste.

He was so unlike himself, of late.

In the mornings he would rise before the others, and build a fire in Elaine's room, so she might not have to dress in the cold.

He brought her the reddest apples from the bin in the cellar, and laid them by her plate, at table.

And if perchance he prayed, Elaine came first upon his lips.

The work about the place and on the farm was neglected or, in some instances, not done at all.

The corn had not been shucked.

The cattle were left to run much as they pleased.

The horses were ill-shod.

A fine mare, with foal, hobbled about on three shoes.

Mamman had taken to feeding the stock and milking the cows.

Baptiste went on his daily pilgrimage, none knew where, through field and forest.

Some who had chanced upon him unexpectedly, in the course of his wanderings, had been strangely affected by his mien.

For he saw no one, be that one ever so near, looked neither to right nor left along his way, and spoke aloud to himself, shaking his clenched fist in air.

It was not long before strange rumors were afloat about Baptiste.

Upon his approach, children ran, screaming, to their mothers.

People craned their necks at him, as he passed their houses.

Men grinned, and, looking at one another, touched their heads with a finger.

Even the dogs seemed to know him; and barked savagely, their fur rising in a stiff comb on their backs, as Baptiste went by, looking neither to right nor left, speaking aloud to himself, and shaking his clenched fist in air.

One night, he did not return home.

Towards midnight Mamman awoke Elaine, who had taken to going to bed, of late, shortly after the evening meal.

The two women searched the fields and, going over to the edge of the wood, called for Baptiste at the top of their voices.

A thick, soft snow, the first of the season, was falling, covering their tracks.

The echoes came back to them in clear and tomb-like tone.

But no answer from Baptiste.

Large, feathery flakes fell upon their lanterns and melted into hot, pearl-like tears.

The stillness, more than the cold, chilled the women.

They retraced their steps reluctantly towards the house.

Then Mamman said:

"The barns—let us try the barns."

Elaine clambered up into the mow; and Mamman went into the granary.

They searched in the carriage-house; and turned over piles of sheepskins and driving robes.

They came to the stables.

The cows were lying flat.

One, near the door, was wide awake, chewing her cud.

The gentle brute looked around peacefully at the women and mooed softly.

They had about given up hope and were going towards the door, when Mamman stumbled against an object on the floor of the empty stall.

She raised the lantern quickly with an instinct of self-defense mingled with fear.

Baptiste lay upon his belly, the full length of the stall, his head under the manger.

He was panting heavily, like a dog that has overrun.

"Baptiste!" said Mamman, softly: "My dear Baptiste, come with us!"

He did not reply; but crawled up further beneath the manger, hiding his face from them.

"Poor father," besought Elaine. "It's only Mamman and your 'Petite.' Come, please come with us!"

She stooped down, and pulled him gently by the coat.

"Come!" she pleaded. "Do you no longer love your 'Petite'?"

There was a moment's hesitation.

Then the big man struggled out on all fours and rose to his feet.

He had changed greatly since morning.

His face was seamed and pallid.

His eyes had a wild, frightened stare.

He did not speak; and did not seem to know where he stood.

He looked about him with wide-open eyes, like a babe in a strange house.

"We got thirty-seven eggs to-day," said Elaine, in an effort to reassure him.

He gazed upon his daughter, and then at the wife, and back upon Elaine again.

He smiled a wan, tired smile, that made him seem very strange and unearthly.

And the women, taking him by the hands, led him, unresisting, towards the house.

They put him to bed and watched over him while he slept.

The next day they sent for the village doctor. The latter spent an hour with Baptiste.

He asked the patient a number of questions about the farm, the crops and the stock; but without avail. Le Blanc would not speak.

He stared vacantly at the floor, at the wall, or out the window at the wide expanse of snow-fields, where the sun played.

He was visibly upset over a sparrow that flew onto the window-sill and pecked an atom off the pane.

"My dear madame," said the physician to Mamman, "I fear we will have to send him away. He has suffered some great mental strain or shock. This is not the place for him. However, it will do no harm to wait a few days and see. Have you no one to do the work about the farm? No? That is unfortunate. You

should get someone at once; for Monsieur Le Blanc cannot be relied upon for that; and besides, in his present condition, the work would be too much for him. I find him quite unstrung and run down."

"Where would you have us send him, doctor?" the wife asked, suspiciously.

"Why, to Montreal; that is, right near Montreal—the asylum—just for a while, you know, until he gets better."

The women burst into tears.

The doctor, growing nervous in the presence of grief, promised to come again on the morrow, and, bidding them take courage, hurried away.

Elaine, following instructions from Maman, wrote to Isidore Lalonde, the second son of her mother's brother, and who lived on his father's farm, near Saint Lambert.

The letter requested him to start at once for Lasalle.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

O'Malley was now major-domo of the Rodray homestead.

With Maurice in a convent, George at college and the elder Rodray completely broken in health, he came, went and did much as he pleased.

He did little work himself.

A stranded laborer, who was passing through Lasalle, on his way to the States, was picked up by O'Malley and put to work doing the winter chores about the place.

O'Malley saw to it that the man was given plenty to do.

"Idleness is the father of mischief," he said one day, with the air of a confessor, as he was about to lay out another task for the "hired man." "Sure, I didn't start out any too well shod myself, in life. But, honesty and hard work and perseverance brought me to where you see me to-day. By the way, there's another

cord of wood back of the summer kitchen that'll have to be sawed up some time in the near future. Wouldn't hurt if you'd start in on it to-day. Remember the proverb—'Never put off till tomorrow what you can do to-day.' Is the hay pitched down for the cattle? Well, you'd better do that first, so you won't forget it. And while you're over there, give this pail of bran to the sick horse; and keep an eye out for that skunk; he stole a fine hen last night—the best layer in the flock. Hurry back now, Jim, and get to work."

So saying, he sauntered off towards the store, whistling "The Rambler from Clare."

William Rodray now remained in the house for the most part, leaving the management of the store and farm to his son-in-law, who felt his importance increasing daily in the household.

O'Malley took a high hand in the administration of the family affairs.

He carried the store cash in his pocket and put it to his own use without scruple.

He made regular trips to the Point for liquor and brought back presents and trinkets for Ann and the young O'Malleys.

He was seldom sober.

Towards Mrs. Rodray he had assumed, of late, an air of cold independence, which, when he was drunk, bordered on the humorous.

He came and went without so much as speaking to her.

But if someone else happened to be near, he would address the latter in a tone of deep solicitude and affection, with a view to making Mrs. Rodray feel the want of his filial love, no less than the sting of his contempt.

On a number of occasions, Ann attempted to bring the two together in a truce.

But the usurpation of the home by O'Malley, just when she had hoped to have peace and quiet for her declining days, was more than Mrs. Rodray could endure.

She rejected all overtures.

For a considerable time Ann persisted in her negotiations for peace.

She approached her husband on the subject; but O'Malley preferred to remain on the defensive, which position he now occupied, and refused to commit himself.

"Peace in the house is fine, Annie dear, to be sure. But it's all up to your mother, my

girl, as you understand well enough. To the victors belong the spoils, as somebody with a long head has said. Now that's a fine line, to be sure. It wouldn't surprise me if Shakespeare had said it—or Dan O'Connell."

Convinced, finally, that further effort at peacemaking would be futile, Ann reluctantly went over to her husband's camp.

There were, however, no open hostilities.

It was more like a grim, silent struggle for temporal power.

Like a spectator, viewing manœuvres from a well-chosen point of vantage, the elder Rodray gazed upon the warring forces, without comment or interference, as though the people concerned in the strife were nothing to him, nor the outcome of much importance.

O'Malley had transferred his jug from the hayloft to a secluded corner of the store. It would be easier of access here, besides lessening the danger of detection.

And then there was the moral and more important reason that its presence in the barn might at any time be discovered by Jim and tempt him.

He put in a stock of candy, of which he was

fond. He kept a supply of peppermints about him which, he claimed, aided his digestion.

He had a way of getting one of the pungent lozenges to his mouth, without being noticed, upon the approach of a customer, or in the course of conversation.

It pleased him to lean over the counter, a pencil in his ear and twirling his spectacles in his fingers, and talk over with a crony the latest happening in the village, or even more weighty matters, such as the sensation of the day or political issues now before the House.

When asked for his opinion, he would draw his red kerchief from his pocket and wipe the steam and finger grease from his glasses. Then slowly he would adjust them over his ears and clear his throat, like a judge about to pronounce sentence.

"Well—" he would say to his waiting audience, before delivering the dictum; this with a view to impressing the store loafers with a proper respect for the opinion about to be rendered.

And these latter grew to look up to this staid and well-balanced man who was at all times

pretty much of the same temper, even when in his cups.

Ann now filled the role of housekeeper, after a fashion.

She rose late and shambled through the preparations for breakfast.

Her hair hung in a loose braid down her back.

The vent of her dress lay open, revealing cheap, coarse undergarments in need of repair.

Her shoe-tongues fell back upon the vamps and the laces trailed upon the floor, tripping her as she walked.

She was still a great reader; and O'Malley seldom overlooked the book store on his trips to the Point.

The rooms lay under a thick pall of dust.

The bannisters and door-knobs, the furniture and bric-a-brac throughout the place were sticky from the hands of the O'Malley children, who were allowed "carte blanche" and went through the rooms munching candies and sweets.

Mrs. Rodray was driven to desperation.

She wished to flee; to forget all about La-salle; to end her days away from this sordid hole that was no better than a hell.

She wrote to Alice, asking if she might go to the Grégoire home to live.

Alice handed the letter to Francois, but he would not hear of it.

He wanted his wife all to himself, he said.

She laid the matter before Father Nadeau.

But the priest advised her to bear her cross bravely and pray heaven for fortitude in this her hour of trial.

"Crosses, tribulations," he said, "are the greatest proofs God can give us of His infinite love. The sorest trials come to those He loves most. Take courage, my dear Madame Rod-ray. There are many who have no home to leave!"

She went home and secluded herself in her room.

She appeared rarely at table.

Sometimes she went away in the morning and spent the day with friends in the village, whom she had enlisted in her sympathy.

Sometimes she drove over to the Point, merely to be away from her surroundings, which were daily becoming more unbearable.

One day she sat down to dinner with the others.

"William," she said, "I want about a hundred dollars; I am going to spend the winter months in Montreal, at the Kirbys', and I shall need some money.

William Rodray did not raise his eyes from his plate, nor make reply at once.

O'Malley, seeing a possible chance to cross his mother-in-law, leered apologetically over his soup and said:

"A hundred dollars! Goodness me, what a lot of money! I know there isn't half that much in the store, squire."

Mrs. Rodray turned a livid white.

Her spoon fell back into the soup-dish and she came quickly to her feet.

Her shaking hands clasped the edge of the table in an effort to stay her swaying body.

Her eyes snapped like sparks in the dark.

For a moment she was silent, rent with terrible passion.

Then her hand stole to her bosom and went upwards over her shoulder.

For an instant something glinted in the sunlight, then flashed through space with terrific swiftness, as though shot.

The knife grazed O'Malley's cheek, skinning

the cuticle and threading his face with a thin trickle of blood, like a crimson yarn.

Mrs. Rodray fell back upon her chair, in a faint.

O'Malley dashed from the room.

The children ran, screaming, over the house.

Ann bathed her mother's face in a hastily prepared solution of vinegar and water.

William Rodray rose up from his seat and came over to his wife, who was now conscious.

"Nothing would do you but that our sons go to college," he began. "They must study for the Church. Well, others must take their place, forsooth. The soil will not till itself."

He drew the hundred dollars from his wallet and slapped it down upon the table; then added:

"You have broken up the home; you have brought it all upon yourself."

And now he turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

They took Baptiste away.

Two strong men came for him, one day, in the morning.

He was in bed.

"Monsieur Le Blanc," said one, "we've come to take you with us for a ride through the country. It will do you good; what think you of it?"

Baptiste stared at them for a moment, vacantly; then rolled over in bed, his face to the wall.

Elaine and Mamman, who had come in with the men, left the room, uttering convulsive sobs.

Suddenly Elaine, unable to remain away, returned.

Her grief was pitiful.

She went up to the men and pleaded with them not to take Baptiste away.

Then Le Blanc, fearing Elaine to be in danger, turned quickly over and leaped out of bed.

The men now coaxed Baptiste; and he finally consented to dress himself.

He refused breakfast.

And between the two men, he walked out of the house and down the steps to the sleigh without uttering a word.

The women came out on the porch. They were sobbing loudly; and their forms shook in spasms.

When they had gotten into the sleigh, one of the men looked back and said:

"Goodbye, Madame Le Blanc; we'll take good care of him."

There was a quick command to the horse.

The sleigh lurched forward.

The bells shrilled madly, rending the air, as with the shrieks of pain.

"Baptiste!" cried Mamman, throwing her hands above her head.

But in the wild jangle her voice went waste.

Isidore Lalonde had set out at once for Lalsalle upon receipt of Elaine's letter.

He was a strapping fellow of thirty years or thereabouts; of powerful physique and very dark.

His mother was a halfbreed Indian from Coknowagga.

Prior to his arrival at Lasalle, he had never seen his cousin, Elaine Le Blanc.

Mamman made him an offer which he accepted.

The bargain struck, Isidore changed his clothes and went straightway to work.

There was much to be done: the corn to be shucked and shelled; peas to be threshed by flail; hogs to be butchered.

The barns and stables had been going to rack.

Isidore would have his hands full for the winter.

He was no dawdler, this dark, brawny cousin of Elaine's, rising at cock-crow and toiling until long after dark.

A bowl of pea soup, a thick slice of salt pork, and potatoes satisfied him.

He asked for no more.

And as for women, he had never given them a serious thought.

Of course, he had had his little affairs in town, like the usual run of country lads.

But these had been merely diversions.

There had been no hearts broken.

Two years in the little parish school, at Saint Lambert, were responsible for his meager store of learning.

His French was mixed with a thick, impenetrable "patois."

He was polite, with that crude affability common among the peasantry of Quebec. And by no means a dullard.

Witty and daring, he risked many a cuff from the women folk, by sandwiching into his conversation shady and double-edged "bons mots."

More than that, he was something of a dandy; and was quite vain of his long, drooping mustache, which, when he frowned before his mirror, gave him, he thought, the air of a general on the eve of battle.

He stood at length, many times, before the little glass, twirling his mustaches and smiling, this way and that.

He bought oils and cosmetics with which he forced the coarse, rebellious hairs into submission.

He was firmly convinced that few women, if any, could resist him, if put to test.

But, of course, he was a decent, honorable fellow; and would not give thought to such deeds, knowing, as he did, the injustice it would carry to other men.

And, refusing to share the spoils of possible victories, he had turned his back likewise upon matrimony.

At sight of Elaine, upon their first meeting, he felt a strange thrill.

Her pale, sweet face lingered before him in the barns, that night, as he went about his work.

He wondered how it ever came about that they were cousins—for she appeared to him as being of another people—a better and cleaner race; this, though he was very proud of his name and of himself.

But, somehow, she differed from others strangely.

Then he tired of thinking upon it and laughed at himself for a fool.

And to convince himself that his heart was free, he sang in lusty voice:

“Au clair de la lune.”

Echoes came in tuneful cadence and mingled riotously with the song.

But, in his room, before going down to supper, he stood somewhat longer than usual before the mirror, twirling his mustaches and rubbing down his hair.

Elaine had eaten.

She had gone to her room.

Isidore ate supper with Mamman.

He enquired if Elaine were ill.

"No," said Mamman, coloring. "But, she is not in very good health."

She changed the subject to the stock.

They decided to butcher the following week.

In the meantime, Isidore would start in on the corn.

"You have plenty of peas?" enquired Isidore, looking up from his plate, at Mamman.

"Yes, more than we have use for," the latter replied.

"I'm glad of that," he said, going back to his plate, "for I'm fond of the soup."

The winter was long and rigorous in Lasalle, that year.

It rode in a-bellow on the first piercing winds of November, scattering the dry, powdery snow

over the frozen earth, until ridges of crystal mountains chained along the highway as though they might have been the handiwork of ages.

But the crops had been abundant; and there was full and plenty for the needs of the "habitants."

So they drew on their thick frieze coats and worked among the stock for a few hours each day, until the sun sank below the verge.

Then they went into the house and, drawing their chairs close to the flaming logs, smoked their pipes until time for supper; then smoked again, and went to bed.

Not so with Isidore.

He must rise early and work late: so much had been left undone by Baptiste.

But he toiled with a willing heart and sang over his task.

For he was pricked with a sharp ambition, of late, to marry Elaine.

He throbbed with joy at sight of his day's work.

He was proud of his great strength, of his ability to withstand fatigue.

He loved the dumb brutes about the place.

And these knew him and came at his call.

On Sundays, he drove to Sanglow.

None but the fastest horse would do; the new sleigh, the rich fur robes, with red trimmings, the shining snow-bells which he had prevailed upon Mamman to buy.

He had thought long upon it before speaking; but at last he made up his mind, and approached Elaine.

"La Petite," he began, and there was a gleam of tenderness in his bold, black eyes, as he drew near to her, "I've been thinking a deal about you since my coming here to Lasalle. I like your looks; I fancy your ways; and I don't care a straw for any little thing that may have gone wrong in your life—now that's frank, isn't it? At any rate it's my way of thinking. What say you to a drive—over to the Point? The roads are good and everything's in ship-shape?"

"Who told you?" gasped Elaine, starting up.

"Why, I needed none to tell me: any one could see. When I received your letter, asking me to come to Lasalle, I wondered then what you were like; and I remember thinking how funny it would be if you and I should some day come together."

Elaine was silent for some time.

Isidore came very close to her, looking into her eyes.

"I am glad you spoke frankly," she said, at last. "For it enables me to give you an equally frank reply: I cannot and will not go out with you, now, nor at any other time. Moreover, I beg of you, waste no thought on me; for there could never possibly be anything between us."

"Well," rejoined Isidore dejectedly, "as you say. But, you'll have plenty of time in which to change your mind. If you do, what then—do I come first?"

"I will not change my mind—nor my heart. Now, please, Isidore, won't you go?"

"Why, certainly," he said, striding off to the door, like a grand seigneur.

Elaine did not think ill of Maurice for his desertion of her.

She knew he was not aware of her predicament.

Too, being well schooled in her religion, she understood the gravity of the problem which had confronted him in the choosing of his vocation.

She even went so far as to blame herself for

his falling off. For, thought she, had she not, albeit unwittingly, tempted him?

And yet, at times, a feeling of great bitterness would come surging to her heart, which she must, with great effort, put back.

For he had said much of his love for her.

And when the days came back to her of his hot wooing, she trembled, even now, with pain.

She had hoped vaguely that he might write her from his grim retreat.

But no letter had come from him—no word of solace in these hours of trial and anguish.

The long winter days dragged in wretched monotony.

Mamman and Elaine were kept busy sewing.

There were many little garments to make.

One by one, the days were told off, like the beads of an interminable rosary.

One day in April, when the trees had drunk their sap and blossomed out in leaf and bud, Mamman despatched Isidore to Long-Point, to see Baptiste.

He was also given a congé, to visit his people at Saint Lambert.

Three days later, Isidore, who had just returned, was bending over a bowl of soup, in the

kitchen, when the door into the hallway opened and he heard a shrill little voice, scolding in no uncertain tone.

He glanced in the direction of the sound.

He was very fond of little ones.

Too, he was deeply in love with Elaine.

"Nom de Dieu!" he exclaimed aloud, clapping his hand on the table; "I'd give an eye to be its daddy!"

In the chamber above, where a little soul had come to life through the agony of Love's atonement, Elaine looked into her daughter's eyes and thrilled.

For they were the eyes of Maurice.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The convent of the Salvatorists was situate in the bourgeois quarter of Saint Trond.

The structure, which was of red brick, was of large proportions and was built in the shape of an H—one wing being for the resident priests and missionaries; the other for the students and novices.

The convent stood on the street side of an immense garden.

Wide cinder paths ran in all directions over the garden and on the edges of the paths were short, stubby hedges of boxwood which never changed from its dark green shade.

The paths were shaded by fruit trees of many kinds.

Pears, peaches, apples, plums and cherries grew in abundance.

The high brick wall that ran round the garden, shutting out the world, was mantled with

a thick covering of grapevines which bore heavily and furnished wine for the Mass.

Here and there, over the garden, were summer-houses, the walls and roofs of which were the trunks and branches of growing trees and vines.

The religious came each day to sit in these bowers for an hours' relaxation after the noon-day meal.

There were, at Saint Trond, three separate bands, the priests, the students and the novices, each of which had its own particular rules of conduct.

The novices, who were going through the period of probation as to fitness and temperament, led much the stricter life.

Out of the one hundred and sixty-eight hours of the week, they must keep silence one hundred and fifty-six.

Each Saturday the entire day was spent in retreat and absolute silence.

The novices never spoke before one o'clock in the afternoon of any day.

However, there were long promenades out in the country and pilgrimages to various shrines, in the course of which the rule of si-

lence was relaxed and the novices were permitted to speak.

All things went like clockwork in the novitiate: Punctuality, austerity, piety, humility, obedience, poverty, chastity, fitted into the rules of the order like the wheels in the frame of the clock.

And the least false tick on the part of any of these was detected instantaneously by Father Devos, the ever watchful master of novices.

Kind to a fault, this long, thin, saint-like man could equally be cruel to persecution—if he once believed that the chastening, the ultimate perfecting of the novice required treatment of a heroic nature.

His favorite method of putting a religious to the test was to despatch him on some particularly trying and humiliating errand.

This usually happened while the three communities were in recreation in their different parts of the garden.

“Brother So-and-so,” he would say, quite unexpectedly, “run in haste to Father Rector and ask him to forgive you for ever coming here. Kneel before him until I send for you.”

“And you,” pointing to another, “go to the

students and tell them that the convent is not built of brick, but of stone. Tell them they have not good eyes; that you have; and that you know it is of stone."

"Did you tell them?" he would ask the shame-faced novice upon his return, a few moments later. "Well, now go back to them and kneel before them and accuse yourself of gross vanity and of saying that which you knew to be untrue."

Of course, these self-accusing messengers from the novitiate were received with kindly smiles and pitying glances by the priests and students.

For these latter had travelled over the same desert wastes, to the joyful oasis of their profession.

When the doors of the convent closed behind Maurice for the first time, he stood upon stone flags, before a high grating of thick iron bars.

In the center of it was a little door.

A dim, vacillating flame, a long distance off, conveyed the impression to his groping mind that he was in a great, empty corridor.

But he saw unclearly and stumbled on the flags, as he made to follow the priest.

At the end of the long space, a wide door opened, and Maurice found himself in another corridor, much wider and longer than the first.

This was well lighted with lamps, that hung from the ceiling.

Here, too, the floor was of stone.

The walls were very white.

An air of cold damp chilled Maurice.

He shivered involuntarily, partly from the cold, partly from a feeling of nervousness that now overcame him.

The priest led him down the corridor, past highly-colored statues of saints, mysterious arches and doorways, and bells of various sizes, which stood out grimly against the white of the walls, their long ropes dangling slack to the floor.

"You must be hungry," the priest said at last, to Maurice, as they came to a door larger than the others.

"Yes, Father, I am," replied Maurice, relieved somewhat.

The priest pushed open the door and they went in.

The refectory was a long, severe-looking room with rows of tables along the walls and a wide empty space in the center.

There was a pulpit, from which the lecturer read aloud during the meals.

Over the pulpit hung a large white plaster Christ on a black cross.

The head was inclined.

The hands and feet, pierced with iron spikes, bled profusely.

The left side was torn open, and revealed the red flesh on the walls of the terrible wound. But no blood flowed from the opening.

A green olive branch peeped from between the livid shoulder of the Christ and the black wood of the cross.

The tables were covered with white oilcloth, and Maurice noted that they were in spotless condition.

An old lay brother, very fat and very bald, laid a substantial meal before the pair and fetched the indispensable stone jug of beer.

Maurice ate heartily.

He had nearly done, when a number of priests entered the refectory and came up to the table.

They greeted him warmly, and asked many questions about the Belgian Fathers of the order in Montreal.

They were like a large family of boys; and appeared very happy.

They laughed much and seemed quite free from care.

It was now late, as time went with the Salvatorists.

So, Maurice was taken to the chapel for a moment's prayer and thence to his room.

The rooms of the religious were pretty much like the cells of the older and more austere orders of the Church.

With this exception, however, that they were considerably larger, well lighted, by means of large windows, and thoroughly ventilated.

The rooms flanked each other, running down long, narrow corridors.

The name of each religious, printed in large, black letters, on a strip of heavy cardboard, stood out boldly over his doorway.

A thick, coarse covering of jute ran the length of the halls, to deaden the sounds of feet.

Maurice, alone in his room, looked about him.

There was an old wooden bed, with a white covering, in one corner.

At the foot of the bed stood a table; and on this was a desk that opened.

Near the door, he saw a washstand, with ewer and basin of delph, soap and towels. There was a chair over near the window, as though someone might have been sitting there, looking out.

A crucifix hung on the wall, over the desk; and on either side were framed pictures of Saint Ann and the Virgin.

The rough, wooden floor was bare.

Maurice placed his candle on the desk and breathed a long sigh.

Then he crossed the room to the window.

The night was very black.

He could not see without.

Something scratched against the panes.

He raised the window and thrust out his hand.

It was the branch of a tree.

He seated himself.

The chair squeaked and startled him.

The wind was rising.

It moaned dolefully in the branches of the trees.

Lasalle struggled back to him.

But he refused himself thought of home; for he felt that he was very near to giving way, that he must battle hard against the call of the blood, else turn and flee.

Memories surged in upon him, in great, tumultuous waves.

Some were women, some men, some places and events.

But he was firm; and fought them off one and all, as he would have done deadly foes.

Elaine received like treatment; and, for that matter, even Valdetta Bergère.

This triumph won, he felt chastened of evil.

A sensation of sweet peacefulness stole over him.

He knelt by the side of the bed and prayed a long while.

It was late in the night when he rose to his feet.

In the street below, roisterers passed, noisily, disturbing the quiet of the night with ribald songs.

"Fools!" he exclaimed to himself, in a tone that had something of pity and contempt.

He went to bed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Maurice awoke to the new day refreshed in body and in better spirits.

Bells were ringing in the convent; but he knew naught of their meaning.

Far to the east, a burst of fire-like light flamed against a spotless background of blue.

He dressed and left the room.

The doors along the corridor stood open for the most part.

The occupants were gone.

He came to a stairway at the end of the hall and followed it to the ground floor.

Through an open door, Maurice caught a glimpse of the garden.

He went out.

The air was sharp.

He judged the hour to be little more than six o'clock.

He began to walk; and as he walked, he permitted himself to reflect on the many events

that had crowded themselves into his life within so short a time.

He came to the vine-clad wall that separated one side of the garden from the street.

It rose before him as a grim reminder of his self-made bondage—an implacable barrier between himself and the world.

The tears of the night lay heavy in the hollows of the leaves; and here and there, a filmy network threaded its way in the nooks and corners of the foliage, like silver spider-webs.

From the other side of the wall, the harsh rapping of wooden shoes on the cobbles of the street came to his ear in rude *mélange* with the voices of workmen on their way to the shops.

There was a sound of steps behind him.

He turned and saw Father DeVos, the master of novices, coming towards him.

"Good morning, my dear Brother Rodray; I thought to find you in your room, but you were already up and gone. Did you have a good night's rest?"

"Yes, indeed, Father: a very good night."

"Ah, very good—the sleep of the just, eh? Nothing like a clear conscience, *n'est-ce pas*, Maurice? You can serve at Mass? Yes?

Very well; come along and serve me. I shall send for you during the day and we shall talk over matters. I suppose you are anxious to begin your novitiate as soon as possible? It is no feather-bed affair, you know, this novitiate of ours—no velvet cushions, Maurice, you understand?”

“I didn’t expect—”

“Of course not. Here we are—in this way. You will find cassock and surplice in yonder closet.”

After Mass, Maurice was taken in charge by a professed student who was, like himself, from Canada.

Brother Haley was about twenty years of age and had been in the convent some four years.

He conducted Maurice to the refectory.

The breakfast was eaten in silence. It consisted of “tartines”—sandwiches of bread and butter, and a large bowl of coffee and chicory.

After breakfast, Brother Haley led Maurice over the convent and grounds, plying him, the while, with questions about Montreal; and sharing with the newcomer reminiscences of his college days in that city.

Maurice thought he detected, at times, a note of regret in the other's voice—a gleam of longing in his eyes, as he spoke of the far away land.

"Is this a very happy life?" he asked the brother, suddenly. "Of course, you know—you have been here so long."

The other hesitated a moment.

Then he said: "I have been very happy here."

"But now—perhaps I shouldn't ask; but I would give a great deal to know. Tell me, are you happy now?"

Again, the guide was slow to make reply.

But he finally spoke:

"No two men's lives are the same. And, therefore, whether or not I am happy should not affect your case in the least. In fact, I might do you an irreparable injustice by speaking of my own experience to one who has not as yet had the opportunity to see for himself. But I will say this to you: If ever you are in want of advice, if ever you feel the need of a friend, I want you to come to me."

Maurice studied the face of the brother for a space. The eyes had a sad, disappointed

look, as though something of much import in his life had gone wrong.

Of a common impulse, their hands met.

"I will do it," said Maurice.

The new postulant had a long talk with Father DeVos during the day.

It was decided he would take the habit and enter the novitiate on the feast of the Circumcision.

Gradually, Maurice settled down into the life of the community.

Customs and penances which, at first, had impressed him as absurd and laughable, lost, to his eyes, their air of grim comedy; and now seemed to him quite proper and in keeping with the life of the convent.

He found consolation in prayer, and assurance of forgiveness.

He thought no more of his sins. When they came before him, he waved them aside with an "Ave Maria," as he would a temptation of Satan.

He looked upon these transgressions as shadows from another life; not as facts which had taken birth by his consent and operation; but as myths, paraded now before his eyes, to drive him to despair and shake his good resolve.

He steeped his soul in meditation.

It was not long before the piety of Brother Rodray was noticed and commented on by the religious.

Few exceeded him in acts of penitence.

He humbled himself on least occasion; and practiced tenderness and charity towards his brothers.

And in his heart there was great joy at the thought of having found happiness.

His mind seldom ran to home.

"Leave all and follow me" did not mean in the body alone, but in the heart and soul likewise.

Lasalle was forgotten. A brief letter at long intervals, in which he spoke of his new-found bliss and exhorted his people to prayer, was the only worldly distraction that broke in upon the quiet of his life.

He grudged the hours he gave, perforce, to recreation, wishing these might be spent before an image of the Virgin or her holy son.

Maurice took the habit on the feast of the Circumcision.

It was a great day in the convent, when a new brother was clothed in the long black sou-

tane of the Order. A day for rejoicing and thanksgiving.

There was a pontifical High Mass in the church of the Fathers, adjoining the convent.

The altar was illumined with a thousand tapers.

The thin, white flames danced weirdly in the playful breeze, like the ghosts of tortured souls.

The church filled rapidly.

The big doors grumbled on their hinges, as they swung to and fro.

The scraping of chairs, the loud patter of wooden sabots, on the stone flags of the edifice, were deafening.

Poor and rich alike came to see the ceremony of the investiture.

Those who stood spotless before their God touched elbows with nameless things from the slums, near the Barracks.

These denizens of the demi-monde found a strange fascination in this spectacle of voluntary renunciation of the flesh and of self.

After the Mass came the ceremony—the stripping off of the secular garments in plain view of the multitude; and the taking on of the black gown of the Order.

While the ceremony was in progress, the religious of the convent stood in a semicircle around the sanctuary and chanted, in voices that thrilled with emotion, the hymn:

“O, quam bonum et quam jucundum
Habitare fratres in unum!”

“Oh, how good and joyful it is

For brothers to live together as one!”

And now, Brother Rodray felt that his cup of happiness was near to overflowing.

Clothed in the robes of the apostle, a crucifix at his side and a rosary hanging from his ceinture, he went to his room, flung himself on his knees before the Christ, and wept wild tears of exultation.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Contrary to expectations, it was not until the second week in December that Ann was delivered of her fourth child—a boy.

The mother recovered rapidly.

The young O'Malley thrived at the breast.

Mrs. Rodray had gone to Montreal.

A letter from her to Alice said she was well and happier than in many years.

She expressed some anxiety over Ann's coming accouchement; but made no other reference to the Rodray homestead or its people.

She spoke at length of Mary and George, in whom her heart now seemed to be centered; and of Maurice, across the sea.

The old feeling of antagonism and bitterness seemed to have lost its edge.

She sent her love to Francois, and hoped that Alice's child, which was expected some time in the spring, would be, as he wished, a son.

She thought she might be back in Lasalle by the time of Alice's confinement; and, in that event, would gladly render what assistance lay in her power.

She was attending Mass, daily, at the Jesuits, where she saw George, serving the priest.

It was a great relief to be away from Lasalle and feel the unbounded freedom of a large city.

No one seemed to care, no one seemed to see what his neighbor did.

Alice must be careful of her health.

It would never do for her to take cold, or get her feet wet, now.

She remembered them in her prayers; and hoped to find them well and happy upon her return.

Alice took the letter with her to Lasalle, and read it to the O'Malleys.

Ann was glad to receive news from her mother; and the children, who were growing like weeds, in the country air, gathered round her to listen to the reading.

O'Malley, himself, who had seen the Grégoire team hitched near the front entrance,

stamped heavily into the room and sank limply into the nearest chair.

He was very drunk.

His hair fell down in a ragged fringe over his forehead; his eyes had a wide, stupid stare and his tongue hung out of his mouth and lolled.

He grinned at Alice; but said nothing.

Since his mother-in-law had gone to Montreal, O'Malley held undisputed sway over the homestead.

The elder Rodray remained, for the most part, about the house; and Ann confined her cares to the bedrooms and the kitchen.

What time was left over from these she gave to novels.

O'Malley, his head swimming with visions of wealth and ease, strode over the barnyard, like the proudest of cocks, giving peremptory orders to Jim, or explaining how something ought or ought not to be done.

But it was in the store that he held court.

The idle of the village made of the store their favorite haunt.

They sat around, through the long winter days, on chairs, boxes and kegs, chewing to-

bacco and smoking their pipes, paring apples or whittling sticks, and listening reverently to the wise saws of the overlord.

Few made so bold as to take exception to his rulings. For the heat from the stove was alluring; and, after all, it was only a matter of silent submission—not at all a prostitution of principles.

So, they smoked and chewed and nodded their heads; and wondered where O'Malley was getting his drams.

For, of late, he was seldom sober.

The fact that O'Malley was now drunk the greater part of the time did not in any way tend to affect the respectful attitude of his satellites toward him.

On the contrary, they thought more of him for it, marvelling, as they did, that one could be so wise and yet so drunk.

But they kept a watchful eye for the hidden treasure and advanced many theories, among themselves, as to its whereabouts.

For they knew he must have liquor hidden somewhere about the place, as a man could not get drunk on water; and O'Malley never went to the village tavern.

One day, Bartlett, the dean of the cronies, came into the store quite unexpectedly, when O'Malley had the jug tilted high and pressed to his lips.

This discovery was the cause of a conspiracy between the storekeeper and Bartlett as affecting the others of the circle.

The secret lived undisturbed for a while; and Bartlett made regular trips to the store for a dram while the others were away.

• But Edens are too ideal to endure.

Bartlett was given charge of the store, for a few hours, one day, while O'Malley drove to the Point.

When the latter returned, Bartlett was dancing an Irish jig.

The cronies had formed a ring about him.

They were clapping their hands, stamping their feet and shouting hilarious approval.

All were drunk.

O'Malley's jug lay on its side, near the stove, the cork out.

The spirit of conviviality finally melted O'Malley, who, at first, cast indignant glances at Bartlett.

But, being, himself, in cups, he thought bet-

ter of his earlier mood, and went out to the sleigh for another jug.

This was the crowning event.

Henceforth O'Malley was the god of the bibulous in Lasalle.

It swelled him with pride to see this swarm of flies about him.

It gave him a pronounced opinion of his importance in the community.

He felt himself growing in prestige.

It was a splendid thing, this mixing a bit with his fellows.

They were all his friends.

They had no money, true enough.

But he had.

And money and friendship were surely more to be desired than money alone.

After some thought he decided to take a larger jug to the Point.

And now the store seemed to take on new life. Grave questions of state were hotly discussed.

There were songs and jigs and games of cards and checkers.

There was warmth; and merrymaking from early morning until late in the night.

And in the midst of the scene O'Malley moved about, cool, imperturbable, the leading spirit of them all and the willing dispenser of hospitality.

He took no active part in the games or discussions, preferring to hold aloof and sit in impartial judgment on the questions left to his decision, as the final court.

One day, Isidore Lalonde happened into the store and got a whiff of the whisky.

He walked over to the jug, which was standing uncorked on the counter, and raising it to his lips, took a stiff drink and laid it down again.

And now, he, too, became a daily visitor at the store.

The strong liquor made him very fiery; and he invariably sought battle while in his cups.

But there was none in the set that would face him; for he was very formidable, and moreover, scowled terribly and gnashed his teeth.

O'Malley regretted having let him into the secret; the more so because Isidore was becoming a bully, taking advantage of his superior strength to sneer and rail at the others.

He would snap his fingers in their faces and spit very near to their feet.

He would utter blood-curdling oaths and come down upon the counter with his fist as though it were his full intention to smash it.

Then, satisfied at the terror he had inspired, he would shrug his great, square shoulders, laugh loudly in their faces and stride out of the store, slamming the door behind him.

Sober, he would laugh and chat pleasantly, like any "habitant."

But, drunk, he was the terror of the O'Malley circle.

Isidore became sullen about the house. At times he was very sulky.

Mamman Le Blanc was chagrined at the change in her nephew; and, one day, asked him why he no longer seemed pleased to work for her.

"What has gone wrong with you, Isidore?" she enquired. "Have we displeased you in any way?"

Isidore was at his soup. "Displeased me!" he exclaimed, looking up into the woman's face. "Think you I am a king? Displeased: why, no; how could you displease me?"

"Well, perhaps I was hasty. But, you never speak, of late, except in 'yes' and 'no'; and, you know, we're all in the family. La Petite spoke to me about it, this morning; and I thought I would ask you."

"Ah, la Petite," he replied absently, dropping his spoon in the bowl. "By the way, Mamman, what think you of the way they have treated her?"

"Who?"

"Who! Why, the Rodrays yonder, of course—who else? Maurice Rodray, who has taken flight to a convent to have his crown shaved—you think I don't know? I am one of the family, as you say; and yet you think this does not sting? Let me tell you, Mamman, someone's going to smart for this; my word for it, someone will pay the toll!"

"Who told you it was Maurice?" asked Mamman, coming closer and lowering her voice to a whisper.

"O'Malley."

"What?"

"Yes—and no one else. Did you not know?"

"Yes, of course; Elaine told me. But, that the Rodrays should know the truth and still encourage him to become a priest!"

"Well, they do know, just the same; that is, O'Malley does. He was drunk when he told me; and I pretended that I was, too. But, oh, there'll be a reckoning! It will strike the damned breed to its heart. There'll be vengeance a-plenty. Why, I wanted 'la Petite' for myself!"

"Did you approach her?"

"Yes, I did. But she'd have naught to do with me. I told her I did not care about the other thing. And what do you think she said? She told me there could never be anything between us; and asked me to leave the room. 'Now, Isidore,' she said, 'won't you please leave me?' This to me, who could have had any girl in Saint Lambert for the asking!"

"Don't do anything you may have cause to regret," said Mamman, timidly; for she saw that Isidore was shaking with passion.

"I said there would be a reckoning," he rejoined, rising from the table and lighting his pipe. "And I'm not one who is given to idle threats."

With that he picked up the buckets of swill under the sink and marched off towards the pigsty.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Winter passed.

And Spring, wreathed in bud and blossom, came on the winds of May.

The river groaned beneath its burthen of floe from the upper waters, discharging great phalanges of ice upon its banks, which melted in the noonday sun and ran down eagerly to rejoin the stream.

The brooks rose up and overflowed, fecundating the earth.

Dandelions dotted the green carpet of the fields with gold.

The earth beamed in sunlight.

All nature joined in a wild medley of gladness.

Men drove their teams a-field, singing lustily, or whistling old French airs.

From far and wide, the "habitants" rode into Lasalle, to market. They lingered long in the warm sun, chatting pleasantly.

Isidore went over the farm, setting up the fences and scraping the ditches to facilitate the drainage of the soil.

He turned the cattle into the pasture and ploughed the fields for the sowing of grain.

Under his care, the horses shone sleek and round.

Their long release from work made them wild and fiery.

They would gallop over the field, kicking their heels in air and neighing.

But they loved their keeper; and, in their frolics, seemed mindful of his safety, if he happened about.

The big, swarthy fellow would stand in the open field, his hands in his pockets, and blowing great whiffs from his pipe, and watch the herd of giants trampling the ground about him.

At times they would come suddenly to a stop and look at Isidore, as though expecting some word of mouth from their master.

Lalonde would take his pipe from his lips and laugh loudly in their faces.

"On with you, good-for-nothings!" he would cry, as he might have spoken to children at play.

And they, understanding, would turn about and gallop off madly again.

Isidore had made no further advances to Elaine.

He contented himself with eyeing her furtively when she happened to be near him, or caressing the baby, of which he was extremely fond.

He brought wild flowers from the woods and fields and armfuls of satiny catkins from the willows along the river banks.

These he gave Mamman for "la Petite"; or laid them on the table before Elaine without speaking.

But his soul was wrought with great passion and hatred of Maurice, whom he had never known, and likewise of all the Rodrays.

He counted the years that must elapse before Maurice might return from abroad.

It would be too long to wait.

He wondered, himself, why he hated this priestling so.

For he admitted grudgingly to himself that Maurice had done no more than might be expected of any one; and certainly no more than he himself had done many times in his life.

He loved Elaine with savage, animal love.
In the fields, in the barns, she was ever before him.

His blood tingled and he longed to embrace her.

But the words of her own lips came to him, chilling and cruel:

"There can never be anything between us."

This, then, was why he hated Maurice: because he had gone before him, leaving blighted in his wake a thing beautiful which, else, must have been his.

He threshed over the matter many times, at his work or in bed at night.

He had little rest.

He devised many plans for revenge.

But always there was a flaw somewhere in the scheme.

There was danger of detection here, certainty of discovery there.

One day, when the fields were ploughed and the grass fluttered thick and soft in the warm wind, a feeling of lassitude came over Isidore.

He wandered over to the river bank where he lay down and watched the stream go rumbling by.

He showed much inclination, of late, to be apart.

Wild bees hummed about him, in the glad sun. Cows came swinging down, from the pasture near by, to drink at the water's edge.

Birds flew near to him for straws and sticks which they took away in their bills to their nests in the trees.

In the distance a cow-bell tinkled faintly.

It was the season of mating and of love.

Isidore thought long of Elaine; of her beauty; of the wrongs she had been made to suffer.

Then the hopelessness of his suit recurred to him and he sprang to his feet uttering an awful oath.

He went back to the house.

That night, after supper, he asked Mamman for a day off, to visit his people in Saint Lambert.

Mamman consented readily to this.

On the morrow, Isidore was a passenger on the Montreal express.

But he did not step off at Saint Lambert.

Instead, he went on to Long Point to see Baptiste.

He found Le Blanc sitting on a bench in the park near the asylum.

Many of the non-violent inmates were there.

Baptiste recognized Isidore at first sight.

He seemed quite lucid and was very glad to see his nephew.

He asked questions and gave ear to all the other had to say.

"And 'la Petite'?" he said finally, his eyes brimming.

"Ah, yes, 'tis on her account I came, Baptiste."

"Has something happened her?" he asked, starting up.

"Enough has happened," replied Isidore. "But don't get excited; you will need what nerve you have before this affair is over with."

"Go on: tell me about it," broke in Le Blanc.

"She's had a child since you've come here. And who do you suppose is the father of it?"

"Maurice Rodray, of course."

"The very man, Baptiste. But—you knew?"

"Yes, I knew—but he got away. I went to Montreal to see him the day he sailed. I was late by several hours. The ship was gone."

"And your health?" enquired Lalonde suddenly, scrutinizing Baptiste.

"Perfect," replied the latter; "but for the spells, every week or two. But, what about 'la Petite'?"

"Well, as to 'la Petite' herself, there's little to say, beyond the fact that she has the child and is ruined for life in the community. The dog who seduced her is over the seas. So what's to be done? Baptiste, we're of the same blood. Are you content to snore upon it? Or do you understand me? Is there to be no reckoning? Why are you confined here to-day? Is it not on account of the disgrace to your family and the wrongs heaped upon 'la Petite'?"

"But," said Baptiste, "what would you do? Tell me why you've come here. I don't know what you want of me."

"Very well. When Maurice Rodray defiled 'la Petite' he struck at everyone of her blood. Is that not so?"

"Yes."

"Good; then, I say it is an insult to us, one and all, which should be repaid in kind."

"How so? He's not here!"

"We will strike at the Rodrays; burn their barns and stables, the store, the homestead. Ah, Baptiste, I have planned a brilliant coup-de-main. And you're to take the leading part, as you were the party most wronged. You're to make your escape from here, at night; journey by stealth to Lasalle and set the match. I have thought it all out. The doctors say you are crazy. So, you cannot be punished. If I should be caught having a hand in it, it would mean the rope for me. But you—they could do no more than send you back here. Ah, my man, that would be a bonfire worth seeing, would it not? And to think that you would be revenged!"

Baptiste's eyes snapped fire and his hands clutched nervously at his coat.

"Yes, yes," he said hoarsely; "yes, yes."

"You would have no trouble getting to Lasalle," continued Isidore. "In fact, none would have to know who set the match."

He ceased speaking for a moment to look at Baptiste, who was eyeing him closely.

The face of the maniac was very white and his eyes were like balls of glass.

"What's wrong, Baptiste?" said Isidore, turning pale himself.

Baptiste made no reply; but, suddenly, he sprang to his feet, and, clutching Lalonde about the throat, hurled him, with terrific impact, to the ground, and brought his boot down heavily on his chest.

Then, without speaking a word, Le Blanc turned towards the keeper who was running to him, and walked stiffly off without glancing back at Lalonde.

The doctor saw the incident from a window of the office and hurried down the pathway to Isidore.

"Are you hurt?" he enquired.

"No, sir."

"Do you know the name of the patient who attacked you?"

"Yes, sir—Baptiste Le Blanc is his name; he is my uncle. We had no words. It came on him quite suddenly."

"Oh, Le Blanc—from Lasalle. He has those spells frequently of late. I fear we shall have to shift him to another ward."

Isidore, his heart full of bitterness at this, his disappointment, went back to Lasalle.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Mrs. Rodray had come in haste from Montreal and gone on to Saint Valentine, where Alice was not expected to live.

She had given birth to a twelve-pound boy.

Three doctors were in attendance.

They feared peritonitis might develop at any moment.

Francois, the husband, was in a frenzy of grief. He refused to look at the child, for its part in the mother's suffering.

He walked the floor like a madman, stopping only to implore the physicians, for the hundredth time, to save Alice.

Mrs. Rodray knelt at the bedside and prayed for the recovery of her daughter.

William, the father, was there.

He was aging rapidly.

He said no word; but, leaning on his cane, gazed stolidly down upon his daughter's face, which was deathlike in its paleness.

From the room beyond came the squalling of the newborn and the chattering of the nurse.

Through the open windows, the subdued voices of children came into the sick room.

They were talking about the Grégoire infant, which they were anxious to see.

A cool breeze fanned the face of the sick woman, fluttering the hair upon her forehead and temples.

The parish priest came.

He was very fat; and wobbled about the room clumsily, panting.

The others left the room.

In a few moments they were permitted to return.

There were lighted candles near Alice.

The doctors made another examination.

There was no hope.

She would die.

Francois groaned loudly and flung himself on his knees, his arm over Alice, his face upon hers.

They knelt in a circle about the bed.

Mrs. Rodray placed a crucifix in the dying woman's hands:

"Have mercy on us, O, Lord!" she was saying.

The priest intoned the prayers for the dying.

The sun had sank to rest, when a slight fall of the coverlet told of the passing.

Mrs. Rodray was the last to leave the chamber.

With clock-like regularity she kept up her sing-song prayer:

"Have mercy on us, O, Lord, have mercy on us!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE.

The two years of Brother Rodray's novitiate went by. Again it was the feast of the Circumcision; and again the altar was resplendent in the light of many flames.

Many had been his trials.

But he had borne them cheerfully throughout, believing them, as he did, to be manifestations of God's love for him.

He had given proof upon proof of his piety and devotion.

He was looked upon as one far advanced in the pathways of sanctity.

None among the Fathers questioned his fitness for the religious life.

He was admitted to profession.

Seven others took, with him, the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, for life.

Each was given a little, three-cornered birretta and a wider belt than that worn by the novices.

The ceremony was very simple; and consisted merely in the profession of the vows.

In the afternoon Brother Rodray passed from the novitiate into the "studentat" or house of studies, to resume his course for the priesthood.

Here the discipline was less rigorous than in the novitiate.

It was quite a holiday in the convent.

The students went for a promenade in the country.

It was a new life for Brother Rodray.

There was more freedom here.

One was less under constraint—more at ease.

He wondered, nevertheless, if this would not, in time, have a tendency to cool his ardor, to relax his vigilance over himself and his cupidities; for he knew these were by no means dead.

A thought struck him: perhaps this would be the hardest trial of all.

The idea pained him. He resolved to banish it as an evil suggestion.

They walked far, along the "chemin de Liege."

The fields lay beneath a thin mantle of snow, over which hares zigzagged crazily.

The sky was leaden; the air damp and raw; the road rough to the foot.

It was the same road he had trodden these two years, unchanged even to the slightest detail.

But to-day it seemed unbounded, broader than before, like the life which he was pleased to picture before him.

Came to his mind the words: "Many are called but few are chosen," and he shuddered.

Could such a thing ever come to pass that he would renounce his sacred vows and go back into the whirlpool which he had fled?

No, no, a thousand times.

And, yet, others had gone through the same ordeal, had taken the same vows and had lost in the struggle that ensued—the long struggle.

But surely they must not have been faithful in the little things, to fail so utterly in the greater ones.

One could not, over night, reconcile one's soul to so tremendous a loss.

Yes, that was it: there were degrees.

It was a ladder of descent.

It could not happen all at once.

Well, he would see to it.

He would not allow himself to be taken by surprise.

And, besides, God would help him to persevere.

He would pray, if tempted; God would hear him.

When they returned to the convent they were served a collation of chocolate and cakes, in the students' recreation hall.

On the morrow he went into class and took up his studies where he had left off two years ago.

He and Brother Haley became fast friends, now that they were together the greater part of the time.

The latter had turned moody, of late.

Sometimes the jolliest of the black-robed flock, he would become, of a sudden, morose, and seemingly indifferent to all about him.

These spells usually lasted three or four days.

Then he would break forth again in jest and laughter, as though he had never had cause to be other than happy in his calling.

The other students used to see him taking long walks in the garden with the Father Prefect.

The two were always talking very earnestly.

And from the manner of the Prefect, they did not seem to agree.

Father Moreau would stop suddenly and, facing the student, would throw up his hands in a wild gesture of interrogation.

Then he would bring down one hand upon the other with a loud clap, as much as to say: "There you are; the problem is solved!"

Sometimes, the priest and Brother Haley would be seen in the little chapel of "Our Lady of Sorrows," praying together.

The Prefect always seemed to be deadly in earnest.

Brother Rodray noted that the older students seemed to give the matter little thought, though they must know that something unusual was going on.

He spoke to a student about it.

"My dear Brother Rodray," said the latter, for only answer, "many come and go. We must pray, pray, pray."

Spring came—Spring, as she comes only in

the Limbourg valley: glorious, intoxicating in her perfumed mantle of bloom.

Far as the eye could reach, the "bigarreau" trees filled the wide expanse, like a softly-tinted sea of green and coral.

The March air thrilled the senses, like mellow wine.

The grapevines, sprouting their velvet leaves, wept pearl-like tears of joy.

It was good to live; to hear the bird songs, the glad babble of the brooks; to feel the warm breath of Spring caress the brow.

Each year the students, under the direction of Father Moreau, made a pilgrimage to Mont Aigu, a famous shrine, some eighteen miles away.

The event was looked forward to with pleasurable anticipation by the young religious.

It was a day free from routine and brightened by scenes that were picturesque and quaint.

Brother Rodray had never made the pilgrimage.

He looked forward to the day as one that would redound with fruits and blessings.

On the day appointed, the students arose at

two in the morning and heard Mass in the chapel.

Then they went to the refectory, where large bowls of steaming coffee waited.

Great platters were piled high with thin sandwiches of bread and butter.

It was a little after three, and still quite dark, when they filed out of the little door in the garden wall, and were lost in the shadows without.

The entire journey was made a-foot.

Litanies, rosaries and monotonous, interminable prayers were told aloud along the way.

They were outside the fortifications of Diest, when the sun, in gold and purple, burst forth over the old Flemish city.

The pilgrims came to an old church and went in, to kneel, for a moment, before its lonely tenant.

And now they passed on into the country again.

Along the way, peasants in quaint garb, straightened up from their tasks and gazed at the passing band.

Stout, red-faced girls and women toiled in the endless fields of wheat and sugar beets, side by side with brawny, stern-faced men.

A lout who recognized the habit of the Saviorists doffed his cap and held it in both hands, until a jeer from one of his companions brought him to his senses.

It was well on in the forenoon when they arrived, tired and footsore, at Mont Aigu.

The little town is perched on the summit of a knob of mild declivity.

It is typically Flemish, with its plaster cottages nestling under roofs of dull red tiles and thatch.

The men moved about in great wooden "sabots" and loose-fitting smocks of blue or black cotton, tied snugly about the neck.

The women wore very short skirts of cheap textures, the same wooden shoes as the men, and short kirtles of various colors.

Tight-fitting, insufficient bonnets covered the back of their heads.

The hair was combed straight and done in a flat knot at the base of the head.

Four roads lead into Mont Aigu.

The church, in which is the shrine, has stood for centuries in the center of the plateau which crowns the top of the hill.

The pilgrims came to a house somewhat larger than the others.

Over the doorway a sign-board, with a picture of a fat bar-maid bearing great bumpers of beer, swung lazily in the breeze and squeaked on its rusty hinges.

Underneath the picture ran the imposing line "Café Léopold II."

They went in.

They ate cold lamb and rye bread, and drank Diable beer.

The landlady sat at the head of the long table and chatted about Mont Aigu and the miracles which were being performed at the shrine.

She told of men and women whom she herself (this was no hearsay) had seen hobble into the little edifice on crutches, and walk out whole.

She had heard the dumb speak.

She had seen the deaf hear.

Paralytics had risen, unaided, from their stretchers, and, before her very eyes, brushed aside their guides and, walking to the altar of the Virgin, shouted the "Te Deum" of their joyful gratitude.

They went to the shrine.

The church was well filled with pilgrims.

There were men and women of all classes
and descriptions.

There were people of many nations.

Paupers elbowed the rich.

Peasants knelt beside nobles.

All were equal here.

The students made their way slowly to the
shrine, on the right of the church, near the
main altar.

Here they knelt and prayed.

All about them arose groans of pain and
loud-spoken prayers for relief.

Many wept and tore their hair, calling upon
the Virgin to hear them.

Some knelt upon the stone flagging of the
church, their arms extended above their heads,
their eyes fixed upon the image of Mary hold-
ing the Babe to her breast, and clothed in gar-
ments of white and gold.

Others knelt with their heads touching the
floor, their hands under their knees, the backs
of the hands upon the stones.

Many lay prostrate, face downward, before
the shrine.

Numbers licked the cold, sandy flags with

their tongues, tracing little crosses with their saliva upon the stone floor.

There were men, women and children on crutches.

The blind, the deaf, the mute were there.

A man, with his nose eaten off to the bone, approached the shrine and knelt by the side of Brother Rodray.

The stench from his body was sickening.

A young girl came forward with a babe at her breast.

The little one turned its face to Maurice.

It was a mass of bleeding sores.

An old woman was praying aloud for the return of her son, who had been sent to the Congo as a "chasseur."

Black-robed abbés wormed their way silently, noiselessly, through the crowded aisles.

Nuns prayed.

Suddenly there was a commotion in the rear of the church.

"Make way!" the sexton was saying, in a low voice; and the crowd parted.

Two men, bearing a stretcher, came forward, towards the shrine.

A young man, in the last stages of tubercu-

losis, looked up from a white pillow, with vacant, glassy eyes.

The hollow cheeks, the wasted, sunken face, the long, wavy hair falling in curls about his forehead, ears and neck, gave him the appearance of a saint of the early church.

He paid little heed to what was going on about him, except to look intently at Brother Haley, who was kneeling near him.

When they raised the stretcher to bear him away, his face expressed relief.

Hundreds of tapers illumined the shrine.

One great candle, as large as a soup bowl and as high as an average man, burned in front of the statue of Notre Dame de Mont Aigu.

A great pyramid of crutches, sticks, trusses and many other tokens of miraculous cures, stood by the side of the shrine.

Father Moreau gave the signal to go.

The students rose to their feet.

A sea of pain-racked, crippled wretches faced the shrine.

A great family of diseased and cankerous humans, weeping over their sorrows and their sores and begging surcease of pain.

They returned to the inn.

The landlady brought them cheese, "pain noir" and beer.

They ate and drank hastily, standing.

And now they took leave of the hostess, and swung off in a long, black line, down the tree-arched highway that led to Saint Trond.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO.

The impressions of the pilgrimage remained a long while on Brother Rodray's mind.

The ills of the flesh, the disgusting state of living, human bodies, and the faith of these charnal spectres, burning in their souls, like the lone flame in the sanctuary, and lighting their way with a flickering ray of hope—all this lay heavily upon him for many days.

But, as time wore, the anguish he had experienced at sight of all this misery and pain gave way to a more passive contemplation of the eternal wisdom of Providence; and, finally, he thought no more upon it.

Spring passed into Summer; and the earth brought forth her harvest of fruits.

The green fields turned to gold in the August sun; and the trees and vines strained under their ripening burthens.

In these Summer days, the students went

frequently for walks in the surrounding country.

Over the estates of "seigneurs," over paths that wound through fields of waving wheat, over highways that led to far-away lands, the Salvatorists went their way, telling their beads, or rapt in meditation.

Sometimes they conversed among themselves.

But for the most part their speech was prayer.

One day, when they went into the country, Brother Haley was not with them.

Brother Rodray was the first to note his absence. A feeling of loneliness came into his heart; and he felt that something had gone wrong with his friend.

They had left the city a short distance behind them, when Brother Rodray decided to return at once to the convent to find Haley.

He approached Father Moreau, who was in charge of the band:

"I feel quite dizzy," he lied. "May I go back?"

"Yes, dear Brother," the Prefect replied, "and, walk slowly, lest you add to your weakness."

It was the first deliberate falsehood he could recall in his life.

It confused him to think of it.

He felt the hot blood mounting to his cheeks from shame.

He thought of turning back and overtaking the students.

He could say that he felt better.

He gazed after them.

They were moving slowly up the slope of a distant hill, like small black blotches on the dun and green.

But, the wrong was done.

He might not mend it now.

And, perhaps, Haley needed him.

He faced about.

The spires of the city shot up like flames in the sunlight.

He hurried on.

The students' quarters were deserted.

But he met Haley coming out of the chapel.

He was dressed in a black suit, and carried a satchel.

Haley was the first to speak:

"I am leaving the Order," he said, "going back to begin all over. I was never cut out for

this life. Oh, Rodray, Rodray, the years I've thrown away—seven long, merciless years!”

“Why did you not tell me, the day I came? You remember—I asked you.”

“Ah, that would have been unwise. Besides, you seem very happy, Rodray.”

“Yes, but this upsets me terribly. I'm so sorry to lose you. We were like brothers in the flesh.”

Again their hands met, as on the day when their friendship was pledged.

But, now their eyes filled; and their clasped hands shook as with the ague.

Their lips twitched.

They dared no longer trust their voices.

A lay brother appeared at the end of the long corridor and beckoned Haley.

The clasped hands gripped each other for a moment, tightly—very tightly, as in a spasm of great pain.

The men nodded in silence; and tried to smile.

Then Haley tore away and rushed down the long corridor, after the lay brother who had beckoned him.

Brother Rodray slept but little that night.

Thoughts whirled in upon his waking brain in wild confusion.

Once he started up from a fitful doze, thinking that Elaine was standing by his bedside.

He put out his hand and waved it gently to make sure it was but a dream.

Day was breaking when he fell asleep again.

An hour later the convent bell called him to the duties of the day.

He could not pray or study for thinking of Haley. But, more especially, what seemed to prey upon his mind was Haley's renunciation of his vows and going forth into the world again—his surrender to the flesh, as he deemed it.

He did not think ill of Haley—he loved him too well for that.

But a great wave of pity came into his heart for the fallen one.

Indeed, he wept, many times, when alone, for him.

And now a great aridity of soul stole over him; and he lost all heart for prayer.

He performed the same exercises as of old, said the same prayers, invoked the same saints and knelt long before the tabernacle, calling

upon the Christ to hear him and make him glad
with heavenly consolation.

But his orisons went unheeded.

And his soul was a great void.

A change came over him.

He moped; and lost ground in his studies.

He turned taciturn and glum.

Time passed. Winter came again.

And again Spring.

And his heart was sick.

Then, one day, Father Moreau handed him a
letter.

It was from his mother.

He took it to his room to read it.

It was the usual rigmarole of family disturbances which he had known from childhood.
But, towards the end, he read:

"Elaine Le Blanc's little girl is very ill. Poor little thing! Perhaps it would be better for her to die, not having a father."

Elaine the mother of a child!

No father!

Could it be possible the child was his own?

He had never thought of that.

And none of his people had mentioned it before, in the letters from home.

God, if it were so—what then?

He sat down and penned a letter to Mrs. Rodray, requesting her, without effort at diplomacy, to tell him all she knew concerning Elaine's child. He would be grateful for an early answer.

A month passed before the letter came.

Mrs. Rodray went at length into the matter of Elaine's motherhood.

She thought Maurice knew all about it.

The child, a daughter, was born some seven or eight months after Maurice's departure from Lasalle.

It was not known in the village who was the father of the unfortunate child.

The little girl was now out of danger.

She was very bright and pretty.

The people in Lasalle did not look down upon Elaine for her transgression.

They did not mingle with her, of course.

But there was no feeling against her.

Baptiste had taken it very hard and his mind had given way under the strain.

He was now in the asylum, at Long Point.

A cousin of Elaine's was doing the work about the Le Blanc farm.

This was about all she knew of the affair.

Brother Rodray looked up from the letter at the white wall of the room.

Then, he was the father of Elaine's child.

It was his child, in fact, as much as hers.

And all these years had passed without his knowing!

His child; his daughter!

What was he to do? Yes, even now that he did know, what was there that he could do?

Was it possible to right the wrong?

If so, how?

There was a tap on the door.

"Ah, Brother Rodray, there's someone to see you in the guests' quarters." It was Father Moreau who was speaking. "It is a lady—a cousin of yours, from Canada. Put on your good soutane and go down."

"My cousin!" exclaimed Brother Rodray; for he had no cousin.

"Yes, yes, my dear brother. But, make haste; you should not keep the lady waiting! And you must entertain her well; I shall send wine to the parlor."

The good man came over to his charge, and put his arm around his shoulder.

"I am glad she has come," he said. "It will give you cheer, perhaps. You have been very downhearted, of late."

Maurice said no more; but changed cassocks, and went to the guests quarters, in a distant wing of the great building.

He opened the door of the parlor.

The room was empty.

The door of the second was open. There was no one there.

He came to the private parlor, which was reserved for abbots and bishops and guests of high position in the world.

His heart thumped as he laid his hand upon the knob.

The door opened:

On the red plush sofa, in a far corner of the room, a woman was smiling.

It was Valdetta Bergère.

She rose from her seat and came forward, extending her hand.

She had lost none of her beauty.

Brother Rodray grasped the proffered hand.

It was warm and very soft, like velvet.

She was smiling into his eyes.

Her red lips were parted, showing the pearl-like teeth.

She did not withdraw her hand.

Maurice felt anew the old tingling in his veins.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Footsteps sounded on the stone flagging in the hall.

Valdette drew herself free: "The brother who opened the door," she whispered, "asked me if I was a relative of yours. I said yes, that I was your cousin, Mademoiselle Bergère, from Montreal."

Brother Rodray nodded approval.

The door opened and a lay brother entered the room, bearing a tray of meat.

He set down the tray and proceeded to lay the table.

There were "tartines" and salad and a large bowl of cherries.

A quart bottle of wine took up its place in the center of the table.

The lay brother, who was Flemish and knew no French, smiled beamingly upon the pair; and, as he was about to leave, made a grand

gesture of invitation towards the table, bowing low.

And now they were alone again.

They were seated at table; and Brother Rod-ray was pouring the dark Bordeaux.

The first heat of passion had cooled; and already Maurice felt a keen pang of conscience at thought of his flagrant violation of the most sacred of his vows.

He was visibly embarrassed in the presence of Valdette and dared not raise his eyes to hers.

Then Elaine and her child—his child, came to his mind: Elaine the vestal, who had fallen through him; and who had borne the burden of her shame, all these years, not murmuring, but in the silence of great love.

Why was he here, dawdling with this creature?

If there must be a woman in his life, it was not this one, but the other, who had a claim upon him.

His pride suffered greatly from the knowledge of his fall from grace.

He knew he could no longer trust his heart—that, indeed, he was not, as he had thought these years, master of himself.

A woman, of whom he knew but little, had made of him her toy and a fool.

These thoughts whirled through his brain, unwelcome and unbidden.

If he fell so easily now, thought he, in the sacred precincts of the cloister, what must be his lot later on when souls were unveiled to him in the confessional; and the sins of those souls revealed to him for forgiveness.

With incredible clearness and rapidity he viewed his act and its consequences.

He had been a traitor.

He had in spirit broken the great vow.

He had touched a woman and desired her, because she was good to look upon.

And then again Elaine and the child—his child, passed before him.

He had violated his trust.

He had outraged heaven.

His sin was a scarlet sin, that would rise up against him.

What right did he have to preach the Word, weakling that he was?

Ah, he was unworthy—more so than the flagging at his feet.

Valdette had removed her hat and coat.

She was helping herself to the salad and tartines and gave no thought to the silence of her host.

The door opened and Father Moreau entered the room, smiling.

The priest drew a chair to the table and asked many questions of Valdettes as to her trip, and her impressions of the various countries through which she had passed.

He inquired after the health of Brother Rodray's people.

Valdettes replied that they were all well when she left Canada; but that, of course, as she lived in Montreal, she would not know of any slight or very recent indisposition.

"But," persisted the Prefect, evidently thinking it a good joke, "when you decided to come all the way from Canada, intending to visit your cousin, Brother Rodray, did you not go to Lasalle, to see his people, so that you might bring a message from them to him? Ah," he laughed, "you Canadians! You think no more of crossing the ocean than we do of going to Brussels."

Brother Rodray was visibly nervous.

Valdettes colored a trifle.

But the priest laid their embarrassment to his remark; for he prided himself much upon his wit.

So he laughed on, good-naturedly, and re-filled the glasses.

And Valdetto and Maurice laughed, too.

Father Moreau remained with the pair a few moments longer.

When he rose to leave, he said to Maurice:

"Brother Rodray, you must take Mademoiselle to the churches of the city and show her the surrounding country. It is very beautiful now, in May."

And, turning to Valdetto, he added:

"We Belgians are proud of our dear Flanders, Mademoiselle Bergère. Au revoir. And do not hurry away from Saint Trond."

When they were alone again, Maurice found himself in better mood.

The wine had mellowed him; and he felt but the faintest pricking of remorse.

It came in upon him like a shadow dimming the sunlight; and even imparted a certain flavor that was not altogether distasteful.

He chatted pleasantly; but ate little.

Valdetto was very hungry.

The chicory salad pleased her immensely.

And the wine she declared to be famous.

When she raised the cherries over her red mouth and bit them off their stems, Brother Rodray quivered with desire, at the very splendour of her beauty.

The lay brother brought cheese and coffee; smiled again as before, and bowed himself out.

And now they rose from table; and went into the garden of the guests.

Here they walked for a while, in the shade of trees laden with cherries.

Flowers were everywhere, their perfumes mingling wildly, like voices.

For a while they were silent.

Presently Valdette turned to Maurice and said:

"You did not think I would come?"

"When you failed to appear that first year, I hardly thought you would, and gave you up."

"And you are glad to see me?"

"Oh, yes; very glad!"

"You have changed, Maurice: you are taller, and, I really believe, more handsome."

"And you, Valdette, have not changed: you are beautiful—as ever."

She smiled and, stooping down, plucked a blood-red tulip which she pinned over her breast.

"Are you going to show me over the city?" she asked.

"Yes; but it is a privilege I have never known to be granted before."

"Ah, I shall be so glad to have you! Those Flemish bore one so with their broken French."

Father Moreau appeared in the doorway:

"Now, then my children," he cried, "you had better be starting, if you wish to visit all the churches this afternoon. Brother Rodray, you can take Mademoiselle into the country tomorrow. Brother Pierre is awaiting you at the main entrance. He is going along with you, as he knows the city and understands Flemish."

At the door, Brother Pierre, who had served the luncheon, joined them.

His honest face beamed contentment and he seemed well pleased with his task.

They walked, over the cobbled streets, from church to church; and reached the convent at nightfall, tired and footsore.

The evening meal was served in the same room, by Brother Pierre.

Shortly after supper, Valdetto rose to leave. She felt quite fatigued from the long walk over the city.

"How long are you going to be in Saint Trond?" Maurice enquired.

"Just a short while, my dear," she replied, coming over to him. "Will you take me to the country tomorrow?"

He trembled slightly as he gazed at her; and his lips moved in spite of him:

"Yes," he said, "tomorrow."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR.

Brother Pierre accompanied them into the country.

He was an odd sight, perched upon the box of the shaky old carriage, with his faded tri-corn hat pulled down over his ears, and his greenish-black soutane, mottled with grease spots, and bursting open over his belly.

He scolded the old convent horse, who threw back his ears in resentment and swished his tail petulantly by way of retort.

“Pegase” had spent the better part of his life in the service of the convent; and permitted no one, not even Brother Pierre, to whom he stood indebted for many an extra measure of oats, to dictate his course of conduct.

Particularly did he object to being prescribed a faster gait than suited his whim.

The vehicle was a coupé of a style almost forgotten. The paint was badly checkered, and, in patches, rubbed off entirely, leaving bare the

woodwork which was cracked in places, and warped.

But Valdette was delighted with the scenery and gave little thought to the wretched vehicle.

Brother Rodray sat beside her, torn by conflicting emotions.

They drove in a widening circuit around the city.

The broad highways were covered with a thick, high arch of oaks and elms.

A delightful breeze cooled the ardor of the sun, fanning their faces.

Interminable fields of wheat and sugar beets stretched over the wide expanse like soft carpets of green upon the yellow soil.

Here and there, along the way, a hare, surprised upon the roadway, pricked up its ears, and bounded off.

Men and women, toiling in the fields, stared at the passing carriage, and bent down again over their tasks.

They came to a fork in the road and Brother Pierre turned off on the highway that passed Saint Trudon.

They visited the church.

"You don't know Belgium," said Maurice, "unless you see its churches."

The abbé came out of the parish-house, and welcomed the visitors.

He was an old man, thin and white-haired.

He invited them into the house and laid meat and wine before them.

He was very jolly; and walked with them down the long gravel pathway, to the carriage, to see them off.

They left the little red-roofed town behind them and journeyed into the heart of the beet country, where the green looked like a shoreless sea, rolling away to the verge.

They had travelled, perhaps, an hour, when the towers of a great chateau loomed against the spotless background of the sky.

A winding driveway came down to the road from the castle.

A wide park lay between the chateau and the highway.

Brother Pierre alighted and, going over to the lodge, swung open the gate. Then he led "Pegase" into the grounds and, after closing the gate, mounted the box and drove on towards the chateau.

"This estate," explained Brother Rodray to Valdette, "belongs to an English nobleman who spends most of his time in southern Europe. We are given the freedom of the grounds at all times."

Arriving near the castle, the horse was tethered; and the three walked up the driveway to the moat.

Swans floated peacefully in the water among great clusters of water-lilies.

There was no sign of life about the chateau; but the grounds were in perfect condition; and the parterres in bloom.

Two stone dragons guarded the front entrance. Statues of the kings and queens of England occupied niches in the walls of the towering structure.

They crossed the stone bridge over the moat and passed on into the preserve, a short distance back of the chateau.

Brother Pierre, who was in the advance, led them to the bank of the stream that ran through the center of the wood.

The brother now busied himself emptying the contents of a basket which he had taken from under the box of the carriage.

He set about to find an open space upon which to lay the meat.

Valdette and Maurice seated themselves upon the bank.

Presently the voice of the lay brother called out:

Brooder Rodray! ici, ici!"

He stood at the far end of a long glade, beckoning, and pointing to the ground at his feet.

"He has found a place," said Maurice; and they followed the aisle to where the meat lay upon the ground.

There was a quart of wine; and after this, another.

Brother Pierre partook of the meal with the others; and when it was over, and the wine was drank, the good man never moved from his seat upon the grass; but leaned trustingly against the tree at his back, and snored loudly.

Valdette and Brother Rodray went back to the edge of the stream.

They were in mellow mood, and one to encourage confidences.

"The river," said Maurice, presently, gazing at the water: "how like the human life."

"Yes," the woman rejoined; "but with this exception, that the river is much the purer of the two."

"That is so, Valdetto. Men make vows and—forget them, at sight of the first pretty woman."

"Maurice, I had no such thought in mind, I assure you. I was only rambling. Do you believe me?"

"Of course I do. But, Oh!"

He shuddered.

"You are unhappy, Maurice?"

"Yes, very unhappy."

"Poor boy! Tell me about it. Perhaps something can be done—who knows?"

She took his hand in hers and repeated in the softest voice:

"Tell me about it."

And Maurice yielded to her insistence; and unfolded to her the story of his life and the story of Elaine.

She listened attentively to all he said.

When he had done, she remained silent for a long time, her eyes gazing fixedly upon the water.

He took her silence as a condemnation of him and his acts.

He regretted having told her.

At length, she put forth her hand to him again; and as she looked into his eyes there were tears in her own.

"I pity you," she began, "for I know what you must be suffering."

"But," said Maurice, "it is torture to think of it. It will drive me mad. Last night I could not sleep. I saw the child before me—Elaine holding the child in her arms, defying the world in her silence. And then, my vows—for life!"

"Let me tell you the story of another life," said Valdetto: "a woman's life."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE.

"It's an old story and a sordid one. But I want you to hear it, nevertheless, for the application it may have on your life.

"I was born of humble parents. My father was a reporter on one of the Montreal dailies. He was underpaid for his services, and, many times, saw his family in want for the bare necessities of life.

"I can recall, in particular, one winter when we took turn about to play in the yard, there not being shoes for the lot of us.

"My mother was a good, kind soul, who had left a home of luxury against the will of her people, to marry my father.

"Through all the trials of poverty and semi-starvation which attended the raising of a large family, her pride was too strong to permit her to appeal for help to any of her relatives.

"But the struggle for existence wore her down by degrees until finally she took sick with

typhoid fever and died. Her death was due more to the lack of proper care and nourishment than to the malady itself.

"And now, broken in spirit and daunted by the spectre of poverty that seemed to grow more relentless as time went on, my father took to drinking.

"I was the eldest child; and the care of the younger ones devolved upon me.

"The loss of my poor mother, whom I loved dearly, the life of privation which had been forced upon me from the cradle, the sudden falling off of my father and the new responsibility for the little brood of orphans, made of me a woman before my time.

"I saw little for me in life.

"Two years went by.

"My father was now a hopeless drunkard.

"The paper which had taken the best of his life for a beggarly pittance now discharged him.

"For a time he sought employment from the other newspapers.

"But none would have him.

"He had no money; but he still managed to get his drink in the saloons where he was known.

"In the course of time, however, they refused him any more liquor. And now those leeches who had in the past accepted the wages which they knew were due to the keep of his little ones, turned him out like a dog and bade him not return.

"A little French bakery in the neighborhood had given us credit, else we must have starved to death.

"One day my father kissed us all before leaving home.

"That night a police officer came to the house.

"He turned quite pale, and his eyes glistened when he saw the utter wretchedness of the household.

"We were eating supper.

"There was bread on the table; nothing else.

"The big man drew me to one side and said:

" 'Are you a brave girl?'

" 'Yes,' I replied: 'Where's father?'

"At the station, daughter,' he said: 'He's dead. He killed himself. Come along with me; and don't tell the little ones. We'll see what can be done.'

"I quieted the little ones who were afraid of

the big man in uniform, and left the house in company with the officer.

"Arriving at the station, I was permitted to view the remains of my poor father in a rear room of the building. There was a long black cloth over the body, which the captain drew back gently off the pallid face.

"There was a little, round, red hole above the temple, which told too plainly the tragic story of our loss.

"I did not weep. I did not, for an instant, feel threatened by emotion. I felt cold, as if the blood had gone out of my veins. A faintness came over me and the tips of my fingers stung numbly. A cold sweat came out over my body. I swayed. Strong arms caught me as I was falling backwards, and carried me to a lounge in the matron's room.

"I did not faint. This last, crushing blow seemed unneeded for my preparation for the life that awaited me.

"In a few moments, I sat up; for I was thinking, little mother that I was, of the others waiting for me, there, at home.

"Presently the captain came into the room and drew a chair over to the lounge.

"He talked very kindly, saying, among other things, that we would all be taken care of.

"Then he took me to a cab that was standing at the station door, and got in beside me.

"When we arrived home, the sight bewildered me.

"I had seen plenty in the homes of neighboring children and playmates; but never in our own home had there been such a varied and bountiful supply of provisions.

"But I could not eat. The food gagged me. It was the meat of charity. And I, who was older than the others and could understand, turned from these gifts of strange hands, sickened and pained at heart.

"The captain went away. He came again the following day.

"It had been arranged, he told me, that I would go to his home to live. I would be allotted light tasks about the house for my keep, in order, he explained, that I might feel independent.

"Julia, the next oldest of the family, was to be given employment in the home of a wealthy merchant. The others were to be placed in an

institution, where I could visit them from time to time.

"It wrung my heart to think of breaking up our wretched home and parting from the little ones.

"But after they had gone to sleep, Julia and I talked it over for many hours, and finally concluded it was the best thing to do.

"Three days later I entered my new home.

"Madame La Force, the captain's wife, received me kindly; and the first weeks of my stay under their roof were happy ones, considering, of course, my recent bereavement.

"But the captain, a good enough man at heart, was destined to bring about my undoing.

"The La Forces had been married some ten years when I went to live with them. They had had no children, which was a source of bitter disappointment to him.

"After the first few years of their wedded life, the captain had grown indifferent to his wife's caresses; and though never quarreling, there was little in common between them as man and wife.

"Madame La Force and I soon became fast friends. We worked together about the house,

like sisters; and she took a deep interest in me, teaching me sewing and fancy work.

"I had lived with them something over six months, before any noticeable change came over the household.

"Then, one day, a violent quarrel broke out between the captain and his wife. There were hard words; and once I heard my name spoken by Madame La Force.

"I knew instantly, though I can swear before God that I was innocent of any wrong intent or act, that I was the cause of the quarrel.

"They tell us that guilt manifests itself in the face of the wrongdoer. I don't believe it. For, though blameless, my natural sensitiveness now caused me to blush and turn away my eyes like the guiltiest of women whenever I found myself face to face with Madame La Force. I know she noted this and that it served to confirm her in her false opinion.

"I had never interpreted the captain's kindness to me as being prompted by anything but pity for an orphaned, homeless girl.

"But the new attitude of my mistress seemed to open my eyes. I saw now with much pain that she was to a degree justified in her sus-

picious. He was over solicitous of my comfort. I could see that he followed me with his eyes when I passed through the room. He would make me little presents of wearing apparel. At table his conversation was directed almost wholly to me. If I did or made anything, it was perfect.

"His neglect of his wife soon became brutal. One day, I resolved to leave. We were at supper when I told them of my decision. Captain La Force made no reply. His wife rose from the table and went upstairs, to her room. An hour later, when she came into the kitchen, she was quite pale and her eyes were red and swollen. She came up to me and took both my hands in her own:

" 'Where are you going, Valdette?' she asked.

"I replied that I did not know, and turned back to the dishes, for my eyes were full.

" 'You're a good, brave girl,' she rejoined and left the room hurriedly.

"That night, before going to bed, I gathered together what few belongings I possessed, as I was determined to leave on the morrow.

"This done, I sat down on the edge of my

bed to think over the events of the last few weeks and plan for the future.

"I went back over my life, as one will, when an important change is about to take place.

"I must have sat there for a long time, when the knob turned gently in the door, and I saw Captain La Force standing before me on the threshold. His face was pale and his eyes larger than I had ever seen them.

"I sprang to my feet and motioned him, with a sweep of the arm, to leave.

"He threw out his hands to me in a gesture of mute appeal.

" 'Go away!' I commanded in a hoarse whisper.

" 'You know, then?' he asked. 'Is that why you're leaving?'

" 'Yes,' I replied. 'Go away!' and I pushed the door against him and forced him back.

"The next day, before breakfast, I was gone.

"I found lodging in a little house on Saint Lawrence street, and set about to find some new means of livelihood.

"For three days I left my room early in the morning and tramped about the streets until late in the afternoon.

"I would meet with a rebuff here, a curt answer there. Some were kind; and offered me tea, and questioned me about my life. But it so happened that none were in need of help.

"On the fourth day, I was passing a church on Notre Dame street when I became suddenly very faint. It was noon; and I had had no food that day.

"With great effort I climbed the steps leading up to the door of the church, and went in. I can recall making my way uncertainly to a pew. Then all grew dim before me. My ears rang with sounds that seemed very far away. I felt strong arms about me. Then everything turned black; and a merciful numbness came over me that was like a peaceful sleep.

"When I awoke, I was lying on a little white cot in a room with green and yellow walls.

"An old woman was seated by the bedside.

"She rose from the chair when I opened my eyes, and left the room. A moment later, she returned with a priest. I learned from him that I was in the parish house.

"'Where is your home, my girl?' he asked, not unkindly.

"I told him I had no home, as well as the rest of my sad story.

"He thought a long while; then said:

" 'You cannot sleep here tonight; it might cause scandal. Are you well enough to drive with me? I shall find you a place.'

"A few moments later we were rattling over the streets to a far section of the city.

"The priest spoke little. He was well along in years. He was a little, stooped man with an ascetic face.

"We had driven several miles when he said: 'I am taking you to a convent.'

"I started up.

"He laughed; and placing his hand upon my shoulder said, in an assuring tone: 'Now, now, you must not be frightened so easily. Did you think I meant to make a nun of you? Not at all, my girl. You will have a good home with the sisters; a very good home—you shall see!'

"We drew rein, as night was falling, before the entrance of a large, severe-looking gray structure. Over the doorway, in a niche, was a statue of the Good Shepherd, holding a lamb to his breast.

"My heart failed me at sight of the grim retreat. But my companion took me gently by the arm and I permitted him to lead me in.

"Sister Loretta, the superioress, came at once to the reception room; and after a few words in private with the priest, conducted me into the cloister.

"My feeling of dread was soon dissipated by the many kindnesses of the sisters.

"There were many unfortunate girls in the institution who were there for the purpose of reformation. But I was not permitted to mingle with any of these. I was given charge of the guests' quarters and only came in contact with the nuns and the visitors.

"From time to time I went to see Julia and the little ones.

"Then, one day, a man came to the convent; a young man, tall and dark, with large black eyes.

"I well remember the look we exchanged on meeting that first time—a long, lingering look, as though we had been seeking each other all the years of our life and had only now found our hearts' desire.

"We did not speak that first time. We would not have known what to say. It would take time to formulate speech. I made enquiries about him; and learned that he was Sister

Loretta's nephew, and that he was studying for the priesthood.

"When he came again, a month later, he sought me out and spoke to me. This time he wore a soutane.

" 'You are going to be a priest,' I said in a tone that betrayed my feelings.

"He did not answer; but grasped my hand quickly and pressed it to his lips. Then he hurried away.

"His visits became frequent now.

"He would always manage to see me for a moment before leaving.

"Indeed, we had agreed upon a trysting place—a dark corner where no one went.

"But love grows bold; and one day when I was working in one of the guests' parlors, he rushed into the room and, taking me in both his arms, kissed me a dozen times.

"When I finally freed myself, I glanced instinctively at the door. Sister Loretta was standing there, speechless and very white.

"Fully half a minute must have passed while the three of us stood there facing one another in silence.

"Presently, the nun motioned me to leave and go back into the cloister.

"Just then Paul stepped in front of me and faced his aunt.

" 'I am the one, not she,' he said, 'who is to blame. I love Valdetta; and she returns my love. She will go where I go, tonight.'

"Then he turned to me and led me past the nun, out of the room and down the steps to the street.

"There was a carriage nearby. He hailed it and I got in.

" 'Wait,' he said to the driver; and went back into the convent. When he came out, a few moments later, he said: 'We will be married tonight. I have decided that love is best.'

" 'Was it he,' broke in Maurice, 'who met you at the dock in Liverpool?'

"Yes, that was Paul. We are so happy! And, mind you, he has never a regret for what he did for me."

She rose to her feet.

"Maurice," she said, placing her hands on his shoulders: "It ill becomes me to speak. But I am about to leave you. And, before going, I would say just this, that if you are unhappy now, what must be the bitterness of heart of that noble girl who has mothered you

little one, who has been content to suffer in silence, all these years, for the splendid love she bears you?"

"Then you would have me ——?"

"Yes, a thousands times, yes!"

"What! Go back? Renounce my vows? Disgrace my family? Are you mad?"

"Maurice, tell me, did you not undertake an obligation to Elaine, long before you made those vows you speak of? Has she not rights—even before God?"

"But, forgive me, Maurice. I have spoken in this manner, because of my affection for you. And I have already said that it ill becomes me to speak. I only wanted to light the way. Perhaps you will see, in time.

"My husband will be here for me tonight. We are to spend the summer at Ostende. I shall bid you farewell at the convent door. Ah, here comes good Brother Pierre."

There was a great cloud of gold and purple in the west. The sun was gone.

The breeze from the river was damp and cool.

They followed Brother Pierre back to the waiting carriage.

"Pegase" was quite upset over the long delay. He threw back his ears in a manner more eloquent than words.

In the gathering gloom, the old carriage struggled on towards the city.

They parted at the door of the convent.

Brother Pierre turned the horse towards the stable; and Maurice was left alone with Valdette, in the darkness.

The sound of wooden shoes came near and passed, dying away in the distance.

They could not see each other; for the night was black.

A cool wind fluttered the leaves in the trees, fretfully.

The woman spoke:

"Adieu, Maurice."

A sob rose to the man's throat:

"Adieu, Valdette."

He put out his hand to her.

But she was gone.

He turned to the door.

A gong from within clanged harshly.

An old lay brother opened the door.

For an instant, Brother Rodray glanced back into the dark, deserted street.

Then he went forward, and the door closed softly behind him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX.

And now a great conflict arose within him; a struggle to the death between opposing forces.

In the cloister, things and men seemed to him to have undergone a change.

To Maurice they were no longer the same.

The corridors were cold and cheerless; his room a dungeon.

The brothers and priests moved about him like beings from another world, with whom he had naught in common.

He looked forward to his meals as the only pleasurable incidents of the day.

His aridity of soul increased.

He found but bitterness in prayer.

The conversation of the students bored him.

He sought seclusion.

The public penitences were horribly out of tune with his mood.

Whenever possible, he omitted them.

Those of a private nature, such as eating aloes, wearing the girdle of horse-hair or steel points, the flagellation on Friday nights in commemoration of the Passion of Christ, and many other deeds having for end the purifying of the heart and the chastening of the body, were no longer performed by him.

He read much of romance, taking books secretly from the priests' library and secreting them under his mattress until such time as he could read them.

On his way through the city streets with his fellows, he would catch himself gazing into the eyes of women, with a poignant hungering at heart.

He argued this matter over by himself.

He knew he was no longer pure; and yet he felt quite innocent of grievous sin.

At times, he would defend his conduct with Valdetie.

Who, being placed in a like position, would have resisted? And, besides, that had been all. It had stopped there.

He went so far as to tell himself that he had achieved much against the flesh, in turning

back, thus, from the lure of a pathway strewn with the red flowers of passion, and calling him on to the feast.

He would sit for hours by the window, while the others slept, gazing out into the night.

The stars, the moon sheen, the swishing of the breeze in the leaves, the weeping of the rain on the sodden earth, had now a language to the ear of his soul.

And always they were calling him away, back over the wastes, to the beginning, where a woman held his face in both her hands, her great blue eyes filled with tears, and tenderly murmuring his name: "Maurice, oh, Maurice!"

Now that Valdetta was gone, he gave her but little thought.

At times, the memory of her even caused him irritation; for it was she who had pointed the way to him, back over the wastes.

He knew his life could not run on forever in this way; that he must, sooner or later, make decision between the cloister and the world.

He shrank instinctively from thought of the final hour, be the outcome of the struggle what it might. For in either instance, it must cause him pain.

One night he tried to pray.

But his words were like gall to his lips. He turned anew to the moon sheen and the stars and the swishing of the breeze in the leaves.

By degrees, his fervor had relaxed until now his indifference was as much a matter of comment in the community as had been his former devotion.

Weeks went by. Life became intolerable.

One day, he failed to attend Mass, remaining in his room instead.

For this he was penalized in open chapter, and sent into retreat for seven days.

The enforced silence, the meditations, the religious exercises of this period of discipline were unendurable to Maurice.

He was himself astonished at the great depth of his fall from grace.

He thought constantly, now, of Elaine.

He longed for her embraces.

For the first time in his life, he yearned for the open spaces of the country, the streams, the forests.

He came to love the tender blades of grass at his feet, the humblest flowers.

He would watch the birds mating.

The lowliest scenes of nature took on an indefinable charm to his eye.

He hungered for his child.

He wondered if she was like Elaine.

His heart throbbed with love lust; and, all unconsciously, his arms went out to clasp her.

The days dragged slowly by, growing longer as they went.

Maurice was crushed by the very intensity of his loneliness.

He grew to hate the walls that rose about him, cold, forbidding, austere.

There was no ray of gladness in his life.

He was wretched; and his heart burned with desire for the love that was denied him.

It dawned upon him now that he had played her false—the woman in Lasalle.

Why had he not seen it in this light long ago, when he prated of his love to her?

He struck his breast, and called upon heaven, madly, to give him light.

Clearly did he see his duty to the child; and likewise, to her mother.

But a voice in his heart accused him of a baser passion.

The thought whelmed him with confusion.

For, if he should take the step—if he should go back, it must be with a clean heart.

Again he prayed for guidance; and again.

But his words went waste; and he felt like a hollow thing.

Then, one day the morning sun burst in upon him in passionate warmth.

The birds awoke him with their songs.

From the parterres, the flowers smiled up at him, and the dew-pearls on their petals glistened like tears of joy.

All nature was calling him.

There could be no mistake.

He yearned for the song of the wind in the maples, the dull roar of the cataract, the wild, riotous bloom of field and wood, for the embraces of Elaine, his mate, who was calling.

The humming of love-laden voices filled his ears.

The perfumes of the earth and her flowers dilated his nostrils and quickened his brain to intoxication.

Had he been asleep all these years?

Why had he not heard the call before? Ah, there was much good in the world, where man and maid followed the eternal law, and embraced and lived as one!

There was no greater law, no purer law,
when love abode between.

It sprang in the human heart like the water
in the spring.

It called for a mate for man; and was as innocent of wrongful lust as the flower that is sterile until favored with the pollen of the male.

Love, the all-consuming flame, the greatest of heaven's gifts.

He drank in the glad air.

His thoughts bounded away, over the seas,
to Elaine and the child.

The blood surged to his temples.

His heart throbbed with a great desire for freedom.

He glanced back from the window, at the bare white walls of his room, at the crucifix and the images of Saint Ann and the Virgin.

The severity of the scene chilled him.

He turned anew to the bird songs, the trees and the flowers.

His head swam; and his heart throbbed with great emotion.

The woman had conquered.

He shouted aloud, in very ecstasy of joy:

"I shall go back, Elaine! I shall go back!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN.

It was one thing for Brother Rodray to decide and another to put his decision to execution.

This much was settled in his mind: he would leave the Order. He would return to Lasalle, to Elaine, to the soil.

But he had no sooner reached the decision than it dawned upon him that what he was about to undertake was by no means an easy task.

For one could not merely pick up one's belongings and walk out of the great iron gates of the convent to freedom.

He knew that in the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, the renunciation of the three life vows, by a religious, was a thing shuddered at; an act heinous, despicable.

The apostasy of a Salvatorist was spoken of in whispers among the remaining faithful.

But the subject was distasteful, and seldom broached.

In his sermons upon Perseverance, Father Moreau would allude to the departed ones, forbearing to mention their names, as deserters and fallen soldiers of the Cross: Many were called, but few were chosen.

This violation of the vows by the troth-plighted would redound to them in misery, sorrow and death.

Their joys would be tinged with bitterness, their lives overshadowed by the ever present memory of their sin.

They had proven false to their trust.

Their defection was no less a betrayal than that of Judas Iscariot. For they had fallen from the heights to which they had been called, with full knowledge and consent, into the depths where darkness was and desolation.

Brother Rodray was well aware of the mood in which the Prefect had received others who had gone to him, to give notice of their determination to leave the Order.

He shuddered at thought of the priest's wrath; for he knew him to be quite terrible in his denunciation of those about to unfrock.

So, now, he set about to derive ways and means of escape, by which he might avoid the dreaded conflict with Father Moreau.

He sought to evolve a scheme by which all might be easily arranged, and in a friendly manner.

Accordingly, one day, he wrote to the Provincial, in Brussels, asking the latter dignitary for a transfer to the English province of the Order.

The application was given due consideration but refused, for the reason that they were very much in need of English speaking missionaries in Canada.

A desperate plan occurred to him.

He thought of going to Valdette for assistance.

She would be at Ostend for the summer.

He would need but sufficient funds to take him across the water.

He was penniless.

She would understand.

Once in Lasalle, he could easily return the loan.

He could scale the garden wall at night, while the others slept.

It would be an unmanly, cowardly undertaking, this wild hegira in the darkness of night.

But it was the easiest way out of the difficulty.

He shrank from explanations on his part and browbeatings on that of the Prefect.

After much thought he decided to adopt the plan.

There was a promenade into the country that day.

Brother Rodray did not accompany the students.

Instead, he remained at the convent, under pretext of being indisposed.

When the others had been gone some time, he went to the clothes room where hung the civilian garments of those who had taken the habit and remained in the Order.

After a long search he recognized the black suit he had worn before donning the cassock.

It was covered with a thick layer of soft, gray dust.

He took it to his room.

After restoring it to its former color, by means of a stiff brush, he removed his habit and tried on the suit.

It was very much too small.

The trouser legs came above his ankles. The waist was very tight. The coat sleeves were too short, as was the coat itself, which would not button.

He walked the length of the room, as one struts before a tailor.

He made to sit down ; but, with laudable tact, desisted.

"Well," he said finally to himself, gazing at his sorry reflection in the glass: "It's the only suit I possess. If I took one of the others, it would be theft. This will have to do."

He thrust his hand in a coat pocket.

He felt something crumpled, like stiff paper.

It was seven dollars in Canadian money.

It must have been left over from his journey to Saint Trond.

He would need it for his trip to Ostend.

It was his.

He disrobed again and slipped into his soutane.

He folded the suit and laid it carefully under his mattress.

Then he went down into the garden and walked along the path that skirted the wall, at

the far end, where the trees hid the enclosure from the convent.

That night he did not trust himself to sleep; but sat by his window until the carillon in the tower of the town-hall had chimed the mid-night hour.

Now he dressed in civilian garb, and left his room. He stood for a moment, still, in the corridor.

The heavy breathing of the sleepers was all he could hear.

He closed the door gently behind him and stole down the corridor to the stairway.

A step creaked treacherously under his weight and his heart leaped to his throat.

A cold sweat came out on his face and he trembled wretchedly.

He stood still a moment, listening; then, went on.

He came to an open door, and, taking the shortest path, tip-toed his way to the most obscure end of the garden.

He ran his hands up over his head on the rough bricks of the wall.

It had never seemed so high to him.

He could not, even by jumping up, touch the top.

He thought of a ladder which the gardener used in the pruning of trees.

It must be in the tool-house in the rear of the convent. He started back over the little path, breathless, heavily laden with a sense of shameful guilt, but confident of success.

The night was still and clear.

The earth lay bathed in pale, ghostly light.

Great glittering continents of stars filled the sky, making the night beautiful.

The moon was very round and white.

Brother Rodray had covered half the distance to the tool-house.

He could see the ladder leaning against the wall of the building.

His plan was entire and good.

He would reach the top of the garden wall by means of the ladder. He would then drag it up and place it against the outer side.

This done, he had but to descend the ladder to the street to be free.

"Brother Rodray!"

He stopped short and reeled, like a man shot.

In the moonlight he saw Father Moreau, approaching at a quick pace.

"What does this mean?"

"I was looking for the ladder, to scale the wall, yonder. I am going back into the world, back to Lasalle, to a woman there, and her child—our child."

Then he told Moreau the story of Elaine and the child.

"Why did you not tell me this before, my son?"

"I feared you would not understand."

And now Moreau was like a woman.

He embraced Maurice and wept over the coming separation.

"I cannot advise you, my son. Do as your conscience speaks. The ways of God are inscrutable; and we are but feeble things at best. Come, my dear Brother, go to your room and to bed. Tomorrow I shall write the Provincial and explain things. In the meantime, pray the Virgin, that you may be guided in this most important matter. Ah, Maurice, my lad, little did I ever dream that it would come to this—with you! And yet, I feared something might be wrong. Tonight I heard you leave your room; and followed you. Ah, the ways of God!"

Father Moreau made good his word and

wrote to the Father Provincial, requesting the release of Brother Rodray.

Two days later the answer came, and the Prefect notified Maurice that he was free.

The Provincial's letter was received on Tuesday, late in the afternoon.

By making haste he would still be in time for the Antwerp train which made connections with the Channel steamer for Harwich.

He was ready an hour before train time.

He slipped the cassock over his civilian dress, so that the students might not surmise his approaching departure, and went to the refectory in company with Father Moreau.

After a light lunch, he announced himself ready.

He passed down the long, damp corridors, his steps resounding harshly in his ears.

It seemed to him that the saints, in image and statue, looked down upon him sadly, reproachfully, as he went by, never to return.

Arriving in the guests' quarters, Father Moreau opened the door of a parlor and motioned him to enter.

It was the room with the red sofa, in which he and Vallette had been together.

Here he removed the habit.

The priest raised his hand to bless him, his eyes filled with tears.

Maurice knelt to receive the benediction, his head bent upon his breast:

"Benedicat te Dominus in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, amen!"

The gate swung back. Maurice walked out into the cobbled street, which was to him the beginning of a world strange and all but forgotten.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT.

On the morrow of Isidore's visit to Long Point, Baptiste Le Blanc was transferred to one of the violent wards, in a separate wing of the asylum.

Twice he had been recommended for discharge, as he appeared to the physicians to be recovered, and in normal condition.

Each time, however, he had broken out anew while the question of his release was still under consideration.

He would go, for weeks at a time, to all appearances fully possessed of his faculties.

Then, suddenly and without warning, he would turn violent.

On a number of occasions, he had even attempted the lives of those about him.

It was decided, after the visit of his nephew and his attack upon him, that it was no longer safe to allow him the freedom of the grounds.

When Baptiste came to his senses three days later he was in a large, bare room, with wild-eyed maniacs about him.

A guard stood at the door to prevent egress. The windows were barred heavily.

He realized, at once, the hopelessness of his position; and determined upon escape.

At times the conversation of Isidore would recur to him.

Little by little, the suggestion of burning the Rodray homestead became fixed in his mind.

One day, when Mamman came to see him, he told her that he grew very lonesome at times and that he felt the need of something with which to amuse himself and help pass the time.

Mamman suggested cards, checkers and dominoes.

But Baptiste would have none of these.

"I tell you, Mamman, what would suit me better than all that: blocks, little building blocks, such as I used to buy for 'la Petite' when she was a baby. The wooden ones, you know. I understand they are making them of stone, now; but I want the wooden ones, Mamman. Bring me several boxes of them, so that I can put up a pretty good-sized building."

Mamman went to the city and returned with the blocks, before leaving for home.

Baptiste was overjoyed.

He seemed anxious to be left alone with the toys, studying the pictures on the square boxes with all the eagerness of a child.

Mamman went back to Lasalle, sad and weary of heart.

And now Baptiste took another change for the better.

For days at a time, he busied himself with his blocks, in a corner of the ward, while the other inmates stood about, in a circle, watching the structure assume definite shape.

There was a house with gables; there were barns, sheep-pens and stables.

There were fences over the place; and trees.

One day, when the buildings had been erected for the hundredth time, Baptiste rose to his feet, and gazed, for a moment, in silence, at the unfortunates about him.

Then he pointed to his handiwork, and said:

“Suppose the man who lives in this house has a son who has done you a great wrong. Suppose this son leaves for a foreign country,

making it impossible for you to bring him to an accounting, must there not still be revenge?"

None made reply.

But all looked down at the toy house and barns on the floor.

"Ah, you don't know!" snapped Baptiste, his face a livid white, his eyes starting out of his head. "Well, here's one who does know, as you shall see."

He drew from his pocket a handful of crumpled papers which he placed in the space between the barns and the stables.

Then he struck a match and lighted the paper.

In a trice the little structures were ablaze.

Some of the maniacs ran shrieking over the ward.

Guards came running with buckets of water, which they dashed on the flames.

Baptiste, who had retired to the opposite side of the room, looked on in silent disgust.

From this day, he was considered a dangerous lunatic by the authorities, while on his part he became daily more determined upon escape.

To formulate a plan of escape from the asylum was by no means an easy task for Bap-

tiste Le Blanc, who was closely watched since the episode of the fire.

To be successful in his attempt to reach the open country, he must wait for such time as two of the guards were off duty.

This would leave but one in charge of the ward.

It must also be at night, so that darkness might assist him in his flight.

Many schemes were evolved by him, and rejected forthwith, for some flaw or weak point in the plan, that might work to his undoing.

On a number of occasions, he was on the point of putting into execution some newly devised plan of escape, when he gave way under the high tension of suspense and went to raving madly.

When these spells came on him, it was necessary, of late, to place him in a padded cell, where he remained for several days, until the malady abated.

He emerged weak and trembling from head to foot; but conscious and very much depressed.

He would write rambling letters to Mamman and Elaine—pitiful, heart-rending missives,

telling of his wretched loneliness and begging them to come and take him home with them.

He began to neglect himself.

He refused food.

His beard grew thick and scraggy.

His hair was now very gray.

His eyes took on a furtive, hunted look.

He sat through the long days, on a bench in a corner of the ward, alone and silent, always waiting, always watching for the chance which he believed would come.

One day, two of the inmates sat close to him on the bench in the corner of the ward.

They were both "periodicals," like himself; and were now in their right senses.

"There is going to be a ball," said one, a tall, raw-boned man, with mild blue eyes and the manners of a gentleman. "It's to be quite an affair. The doctors and nurses and guards will dance with the inmates."

"That's not for us," rejoined his companion, a short, heavy fellow, with weazel eyes and a low, narrow brow. "It's for the others, that don't get spells. It's to be Thursday night. The guards were talking about it a while ago. Crane and Murray are going. But Wilson, the

new guard, will stay on duty in the ward. God, if somebody got bad, eh? If somebody got bad, what then, eh?"

At this moment Wilson, the new guard, happened to pass.

The two men ceased talking.

Baptiste, who had overheard the conversation, scrutinized the guard eagerly.

"Thursday night," he said under his breath. "Thursday night, or never!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE.

The asylum dances were given at intervals for the recreation of the harmless, non-violent inmates.

They were productive of much good in the institution, relaxing the minds of these unfortunates and relieving them, for the time being, of their cares and their sorrows.

Those there were, however, who, for various reasons, were not permitted to attend the entertainments.

And among the number was Baptiste Le Blanc.

The night of the dance found him well prepared to do battle, if need arose, for his freedom.

But, as a first means of escape, he would content himself with stealth and strategy.

He had formulated no definite plan of action; for he knew not what avenues might open to favor his delivery.

This he knew, that all those not on duty that night would be in the far wing of the asylum, where the ball would be held; and, also, that the music would drown any noise or outcry that might be made to thwart his attempt at escape.

From a fellow inmate he had bought a stout, sharp-pointed jack-knife, with which he would defend himself in the event of discovery.

He was fully determined to gain his liberty that night or die in the attempt.

The night came on clear and stilly.

The sky was studded with stars and the earth lay bathed in soft moonlight.

Baptiste waited a long while, his eye furtively on Wilson, the new guard, who was now alone in charge of the ward.

Through the barred windows the strains of an old French waltz floated into the great, bare room.

Some of the maniacs grabbed each other clumsily about the body and went through a shred of the number.

Others attempted to sing.

Some climbed upon the window sills and peered longingly across the wide lawn at the

lights in the ball-room, that twinkled like little stars in the night.

Once, the guard left his post at the door and went out into the hall.

But Baptiste feared a ruse on the part of Wilson; and remained seated.

His heart thumped wildly and instinctively his hand sought the jack-knife.

His eyes were riveted on the half-open door.

It moved a little and the guard reappeared.

Wilson was a new man. He knew naught of this business of caring for lunatics; and had already expressed himself as being dissatisfied with the work.

On entering the ward he left the door ajar and went over to a window where a number of the inmates stood watching the lights, and the figures gliding in the distance.

All the patients were now standing in little groups at the windows, their backs to Baptiste.

But, to reach the door without detection, it would require extreme caution on his part. For, at any moment someone might turn around and catch him in the act.

The inmates were not to be trusted.

They curried favor with the guards.

He remained in a sitting posture, and, by means of his hands, moved along slowly towards the door, his eyes, the while, fixed upon the men at the windows.

Once, Wilson turned about and eyed him.

Baptiste made a supreme effort to control himself, and smiled at the guard.

This relieved the other's suspicion, and he turned back to the window.

In another moment he had come to the end of the bench.

There was still a distance of some ten paces to cover before reaching the door.

He grasped the jack-knife and opened it.

Softly, like a cat, he tiptoed across the space, which to him seemed interminable.

Reaching the door in safety, he glanced back hastily at the long line of men along the wall, to make sure he had not been seen.

Their faces were still turned away in the direction of the lights and the music.

There was no one in the main hall to stop or question him.

He passed the office and descended the long flight of stairs to the outer door.

There was a soft patter behind him.

He drew his knife and wheeled about
It was Rover, the superintendent's
foundland dog, coming towards him,
wagging in token of friendship.

Baptiste stroked the big fellow on the
back and turned to the door.

It opened.

Then closed again.

Baptiste was free.

CHAPTER THIRTY.

The day after the interment of Alice, Mrs. Rodray drove back to Lasalle together with William and George.

The death of the daughter seemed to have narrowed the gap between the parents.

They were both very sad.

They reminded each other, along the way, of this or that good trait in the departed child.

Mrs. Rodray referred, at times, to her stay in Montreal, and William spoke of certain improvements to be made on the homestead and of the spring planting and sowing.

George had grown to be quite a man.

He had not, as yet, decided upon a vocation.

He was very fond of women; and something of a gallant.

In his classes he was a dullard, but managed to get along at a fair rate, by reason of his conciliatory attitude towards the various professors and prefects.

The priests would say, among themselves:

"Ah, he is not like his brother, Maurice: Maurice was so proud and determined!"

The improved relations between the elder Rodrays continued after their return to Lasalle.

For the first time in many years, they chatted at table, studiously avoiding any topic that had, in the past, been the cause of ill-feeling between them.

True enough, there were old wounds, that might never be healed or forgotten.

But the pain of them was borne in silence and in resignation.

There seemed to be between them a tacit understanding, an unspoken agreement to lay aside the past with all its bitterness and to strive for better things now that they were growing old.

One kind word encouraged another until the old itching of antagonism was no longer evident, even in matters which had used to be the cause of great contention.

The death of Alice had awakened them, as from a sound sleep.

The love of Francois for their daughter blos-

somed before them, like a flower of rare beauty in the winter of their lives.

And they said, in their hearts, that he loved her better than they had loved her, though she was their flesh and their blood.

They would even drive into the country to visit for the day at the house of a friend.

Sometimes they went over to the lake, where Maurice and Elaine had gone. They would gaze out upon the waters, their hearts burdened with the mystery of the murmuring waves.

The reconciliation between William Rodray and his wife had a disquieting effect upon O'Malley, who viewed with apprehension the peaceful closing scene of these strife-ridden lives.

He had lost none of his prestige among the cronies.

On the contrary, he was looked up to by all who guzzled his whisky and sat through their days in the store.

He was much given to counselling those gathered about him, on occasion.

"Now, boys," he would say to men older than himself, "remember what the good book says:

'Do unto others,' boys, 'do unto others.' That rule's good enough for anyone: I've followed it all my life."

The circle had grown to considerable proportions. But the liberality of the host never balked at the numbers.

All the more cause, thought he, to be pleased with himself.

Frequently, when in his cups, he would stagger out from behind the counter and face the group of tipplers, who were usually as drunk as himself:

"They're all my friends," he would soliloquize, in their hearing. "Not a man jack among 'em that's not a friend o' Hugh O'Malley's."

And they would take up the cue and chorus glibly:

"It's Mr. O'Malley that knows his friends, and no mistake!"

Or:

"And where would a man be looking for a better friend than himself?"

To which Bartlett, the dean of the cronies, would invariably add:

"Three cheers for O'Malley!"

This outburst of affection and loyalty never grew old to O'Malley.

It never failed to well tears of joy in his blood-shot eyes.

Bringing his soiled red kerchief into play, he would make his way uncertainly to the chest where the coveted jug was kept; and, drawing it forth from its hiding-place, bear it in both arms, slowly, and with a pitiful show of dignity, to the waiting group.

There were wild orgies in the store. Long nocturnal carousals.

There were card games, small gambling, songs, wild, ghoulish yarns; and fiddling; and always liquor—for O'Malley's jug formed the pivot, the center and horizon of their little lives.

O'Malley had taken on flesh.

His red, flabby face was now streaked with little branches of purplish veins.

And under his watery eyes were puffy sacks, blackish, like the touch of mortality.

His hands, which were swollen and red, shook like leaves on a tree when he raised them to his face.

He had long since tired of raw eggs. He ate but little now.

He spent but little time with Ann, who was again with child.

He never failed to bring her novels from the Point, which she read with ever increasing interest.

Her old ways about the house had not improved.

Upon her return from Montreal, Mrs. Rodray was obliged to assume the burthen of the duties in the household.

Under Ann's mismanagement the house was going to rack.

A glimpse at the fields said little better for the farm.

Then it was that it came to Mrs. Rodray that perhaps she was partly to blame.

She and O'Malley did not speak.

But, as he came but rarely to the house, during the day, her son-in-law's presence on the place was of little matter to her.

It was now some time since she had heard from Maurice.

She was worried about his long silence.

He might be sick.

She waited from day to day, hopefully at first, and then, as the days dragged into weeks, with a strange misgiving which she could not, herself, understand.

One day Mrs. Rodray was in the garden, when Elaine Le Blanc's little girl ran up to the paling and shouted, in childish joy:

"My papa's coming home!"

"Your papa, my child?"

"Yes; mama says he went very far away; and that he's coming home; and that he'll never leave us any more."

Mrs. Rodray looked into the eyes of the child.

A dreadful thought struck her.

She started.

The little girl was gazing up at her, smiling delightedly over her good news.

Mrs. Rodray said to her kindly:

"It will be very nice to have your papa home again, my dear."

Then the little one saw her mother waving to her, in the distance; and ran off towards the house of the Le Blancs.

Mrs. Rodray said naught of her misgiving to William or the others.

Many times she went over the matter in her mind.

She admitted, with great reluctance, that Maurice was not free from suspicion.

Where was he now?

Why this long silence?

She remembered, now, the many days her son had spent with Elaine, during his last vacation in Lasalle. They had been inseparable.

And then, the eyes of the child—it was as if Maurice himself had stood there before her.

And his last letter, enquiring about Elaine and her child:

Why had she not thought of it long ago?

She shuddered at thought of the disgrace, if it were so that he was coming home:

God, what some mothers had to bear!

She plucked a few pansies and went back into the house, where she sought the quiet of her room.

William found her, an hour later, kneeling by the bed and weeping softly.

"It was the will of God," he said, referring to the loss of Alice. "He gave her to us, and He took her away. We should not complain."

And Mrs. Rodray made no reply; but, brushing away the tears, walked out with William into the twilight.

The katy-dids filled the air with their persistent, tell-tale song.

And from the river the trilling of frogs came to their ears.

They walked, in silence, down the gravel driveway that led to the road.

The sounds of voices came from the store, as they went by.

All words were drowned in loud, discordant laughter and song.

Mrs. Rodray brought her hands together impatiently and gazed upwards, at the sky, in mute appeal.

William spoke at last:

"O'Malley has to go: I shall endure it no longer."

"But Ann, the way she is now: Have you thought of that?"

"Ann may remain if she wishes to; she is our daughter; but O'Malley will have to go. I shall tell him in the morning."

The incident cut short their walk.

They turned about and retraced their steps to the house.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE.

In the home of the Le Blancs, Elaine sat far into the night, reading over and over the letter which she had received that day from Maurice.

He had heard but recently of his paternity. He loved Elaine as he had loved her on that first day; and longed to set eyes on their child.

He realized the great wrong he had done her, and would atone.

He had left the Order of the Most Holy Saviour—renounced his vows.

By many he would be considered a renegade, a traitor to heaven.

But this he would endure gladly, if only she would give him back her love.

If still her heart was true to him, she must watch for him, as he might not say just what day he would arrive in Lasalle.

Mamman was overjoyed to hear the good news, and laughed and sang throughout the day as she used to do when all was well with them.

At the supper table, after Elaine had gone to her room, Mamman imparted the news to her nephew, Isidore Lalonde.

He made no comment; but seemed to lose his appetite at once.

For several moments he gazed down absently at his plate.

And now, with sudden decision, he rose up from the table and went out to the barns.

From its peg on the wall, he took down a short, vicious-looking knife and drew it from its sheath.

He felt the edge of it with his thumb, and shook his head dubiously.

It would have to be sharper than that.

He took it over to the grind-stone in the corner of the barn.

He worked for a long while, until the knife had an edge like a razor.

Then he replaced it in the sheath and slipped it into his pocket.

As he started off for the Rodray store, he sang aloud in clear, resonant voice:

“Si tu vois mon pays,
Mon pays malheureux,
Va dire a mes amis
Que je me souviens d’eux.”

The orgy was at its height when Lalonde entered the store.

The newcomer cast a glance about him at the circle.

They were all very drunk.

The jug stood solemnly on the counter.

Isidore crossed the floor and, taking it deliberately in both hands, drank a long draught.

He lighted his pipe and seated himself on a box, by the side of O'Malley.

One by one the revellers rose and tilted the jug to their lips, growing more boisterous, the while, and more unconstrained.

They were very loud.

They sang wild, rambling songs.

They stamped the floor heavily in a hopeless effort to go through the movements of a jig.

Some laughed excessively over nothing.

Others found cause to weep over the pledging of their devotion.

When the last of the liquor was drank, Isidore was as well along in his cups as the others.

The cronies straggled out into the moonlight and staggered down the village street, parting, at points, and going their various ways.

When they were left alone, Isidore looked up at O'Malley, and said:

"I hear your priestling's to be back shortly."

"Who do you mean, not Maurice?"

"Himself, and no one else. As I understand it, he's not very far from Lasalle even now. He has given up the idea of becoming a saint. He has come back to earth again; and already he's hunting him a wife."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed O'Malley. "Damn, but you're a sharp one at getting the news! My, my! Coming back to Lasalle, is he? Bad 'cess to the fool! Now I wonder what he thinks there's here for him to do."

"He wants to marry Elaine Le Blanc, of course," rejoined Isidore, with an oath.

"Come along," said O'Malley, changing the subject: "I keep a little drop in the barn, for emergencies, as the doctors would say. I'll lock up and take you with me."

He turned the key in the door and put it in his pocket.

Then Isidore and O'Malley, hanging on to each other for support, turned towards the barn and struggled for the goal.

Arriving at the barn, they went in and closed the door behind them.

Isidore sat down heavily upon a heap of hay, and O'Malley fumbled for the jug.

"Damned if I know just where I hid it," he said, after a vain search. "Seems to me it ought to be right here, under the robes. Ah, I thought so: there she is, Isidore, my boy; and it's good and full she is, to be sure. Come now, my laddie-buck, and drink hearty. We'll drink to each other's health and good fortune. How's that, Isidore? Health and good fortune! That's all anyone can wish for in this world, Isidore. It is, to be sure."

"You may drink as you please," replied Lalonde, struggling to his feet. "But I have a different toast—I toast your priestling—with this."

As he spoke, he drew the knife from his pocket, and out of its sheath.

The moonlight, coming in through the cracks in the walls, played on the short, pointed blade.

"What!" said O'Malley: "You wouldn't do that, would you, man? You wouldn't kill, would you?"

"Kill? Did you say kill? You talk plain, to be in so dark a place. Well, let that go. I have nothing against you. But, tell me, your

priestling, did he not kill? Give me the jug. I'll have a drink and go home. I don't like this place. Give me the jug!"

"Nonsense, my lad; it's nonsense you're talking: Sure you've got nothing against the place, at all. And here's the jug. And it's welcome you are, to be sure."

Lalonde drank; but did not leave.

Instead, he fell back limply upon the hay.

O'Malley now raised the jug to his lips.

He threw his head back and opened his mouth to receive the liquor.

As he did so, he lost his balance and fell backward by the side of Lalonde.

The jug fell to the floor, in pieces.

O'Malley made no attempt to regain his feet; but lay where he had fallen, like dead.

And now the quiet of the night was broken only by the snores of the two, who lay there, oblivious to all about them.

Some time passed.

It was well on in the night.

Without the barn, not a thing stirred.

The moon was a silver disk.

There were many stars.

The countryside lay bathed in soft, pale light.

The earth slept.

The pair lay where they had fallen, still snoring deeply.

Suddenly, the door of the barn opened, and the moonlight flooded the floor.

In the framework of the door, hatless, wild-eyed, unkempt, stood Baptiste Le Blanc.

Fortune had favored his escape from the asylum and his subsequent flight through the country back to Lasalle. He had avoided the railways, fearing detection and arrest. He rode some twenty miles with a farmer who was returning home from Montreal.

The remainder of the way he walked, stopping at farm houses along the road for food and drink.

He arrived in the countryside of Lasalle on the morrow of his escape from Long Point.

A league or so to the north of the village, he entered a thickly wooded forest of pines and lay down to rest until darkness came to shield him.

When he awoke it was night.

The sleep had refreshed him.

He thought of his mission; and started off towards the sleeping village at a steady gait.

His brain seemed to him quite clear.

He knew what he was about.

He reasoned out the justice of the act which he contemplated.

These people beyond, in the house on the hill, or one of them, which amounted to the same, had wronged "la Petite."

It was meet and proper that she be avenged.

He approached the barn with the utmost caution.

Once he turned and gazed across the moonlit fields at his home by the wayside.

There was a light in Elaine's room.

The night wind fluttered the leaves in clumps of trees nearby.

He started.

But, becoming reassured, he went on.

Arriving at the barn, he pushed the slide-door.

It opened without noise.

For a moment he surveyed the scene.

He saw the mows filled to the roof with hay.

He saw the floors piled up with the overflow of last year's harvest.

He saw, as he would have seen in the light

of day, the faces of O'Malley and Lalonde, a bluish white in the pale sheen.

Their mouths were wide open, their arms stretched out, helpless and limp.

He examined the door.

The key was in the lock, on the outside.

He took a match from his pocket and struck it noiselessly on his thigh.

He stooped down quickly and touched the flame to the hay on the floor.

And now, with the cunning of a fiend, he closed the door and turned the key.

This done, he started off, on a run, for the pine forest, where he had slept that afternoon, and from which he could watch the fire.

There was a low muffled roar, as of a storm gathering strength.

There was a shriek—a wild, blood-curdling yell.

Then voices mingled, weeping madly, calling aloud.

But only for a space.

A moment later, the flames had burst free of the barn and were leaping upwards from the roof, in a mad endeavor to reach the sky.

The great blaze awoke the Rodrays.

The villagers came running to the scene.

The fire spread to the stables and sheep-pens; and snaked along the fence rails, towards the orchards and the house, with incredible rapidity.

Neighbors came running with buckets, ladders and axes.

A number ran up to the burning fences and began to chop them down, in an effort to keep back the fire from the house.

But the flames swirled and gyrated madly about them, driving them back, like sheep, to the highway.

All Lasalle was now awake and there.

For many miles the great flaming pile cast the crimson shadows of its fire over the sleeping land.

Birds, in their nests in the trees, awoke, calling wildly to their mates, and darted off, in deadly fright, they knew not whither.

In the pastures cows stampeded, bellowing pitifully.

Horses galloped madly over the fields in a vain effort to escape the awful spectre of the fiery light.

Sheep huddled into flocks, bleating.

When all hope was abandoned, the villagers grouped together on the flank of a hill at a safe distance from the flying sparks; and from this amphitheatre they watched, with varying emotions, the ruthless, pitiless flames in their work of death and devastation.

Strangers, attracted by the flaming sky, came from neighboring villages, to see.

It was a sight such as there had never been in Lasalle.

It would never be forgotten.

It made the blood stop at the heart.

It filled the soul with the horror of its majesty.

William Rodray and his wife stood together, apart from the crowd, watching the scene.

The red flare lighted their faces, which were pale and drawn.

The woman leaned upon her husband's arm.

William was barefoot and hatless.

He wore a pair of trousers and a shirt which was open at the chest.

His long white hair fluttered wistfully in the hot wind.

He leaned heavily upon his cane and gazed, speechless, on the awful spectacle before him.

A few steps away stood Ann, with her little ones huddled about her.

She was clad in a petticoat and shawl; and the children wore only their night gowns.

Ann did not speak to the elder Rodrays.

She looked about her nervously for some sign of O'Malley, whom she would never again see in life.

She shuddered, as women do, when struck by premonition of disaster.

She tried to comfort the little ones, by saying:

"Don't cry, dears; father will be here soon."

Suddenly a stiff gust of wind struck the flames, bending them over towards the house and carrying upon its breast a fiery cloud of sparks.

A dozen throats shouted:

"The house is on fire!"

The circle widened.

The sky was hidden by a great, wide canopy of red.

The fire stopped at nothing.

It swept away the fences, swooped down upon the orchards, leaving the trees black, leafless and dead.

Then the store caught fire and shot up into flames, like tinder.

The Rodrays looked upon the burning home, motionless, tearless, like lifeless things.

There was a sharp, crackling sound, followed by a swaying of the gable timbers; then a loud, booming crash, as the roof sank within the walls of the house.

A great belch of fire and smoke shot up to heaven, scattering sparks for acres around.

The fire lasted far into the night.

By degrees, the flames paled, growing lurid in the darkness.

Towards dawn, they had died down to whirling columns of smoke.

When the sun rose again over Lasalle, naught remained of the Rodray homestead but a blackened, smouldering mass.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO.

It was the day after the fire.

There was a knot of villagers and farmers on the station platform.

The same little group of the curious and idle of Lasalle that had come, for years, to witness the arrival and departure of the trains.

They chewed and smoked, their hands in their pockets, sitting on trucks and crates and boxes.

A lazy, desultory conversation wagged among them.

The train was late.

Sometimes, one of the little group would rise slowly to his feet and lumber out to the tracks, to scan the horizon.

The baggage master went about his duties with a show of quiet, awkward dignity.

He chewed and spat with the gravity becoming office, and paid little heed to the loafers squatted about on the platform.

The day, warm and laden with the breath of new mown fields, was closing, in a halo of fiery gold.

There was a shrill, far-off call, like a muffled shriek; and a small puff of light blue smoke went up from something like a black dot on the horizon.

A moment later the thing took shape and the tracks vibrated with the sound of the approaching train.

The loungers came near to the edge of the platform, as the train thundered down the track and came to a stop before the station.

A woman and a child came down the steps of the second coach and walked over to a waiting carriage.

They were followed by Father Nadeau, who had been to Montreal that day. He, too, stepped into a vehicle and drove off towards Sanglow.

Then, from the rear coach, a man stepped stiffly onto the platform.

He was tall, and dark, and none too stoutly built.

But he walked erect and, as he passed the group of men, who were now nudging one an-

other and whispering among themselves, he looked them calmly in the eyes.

He did not speak; nor look back, when someone tittered.

But with head still erect, he turned off onto the road that led to the village.

He was tired.

He had journeyed long and far.

He did not halt to rest; but, footsore and hungry of heart, he trudged wearily on, his eyes fixed eagerly upon the knoll in the road, overlooking the valley.

He stumbled against the stones at his feet.

For he did not look upon the ground; but gazed steadily ahead, his eyes uplifted, scanning the distance, where he hoped to see her coming to meet him.

But she did not appear; and with a cruel, death-like flutter at the heart, he climbed the ascent.

Women in the farm houses recognized him and hurried away to tell their brood.

Doors and windows were filled with awe-struck, wondering faces, as he passed upon his way.

An old French woman who had lived for

many years off the bounty of the Rodrays, crossed herself at sight of the tall, dark man, and hobbled into her cabin, muttering:

"Apostat! Apostat!"

The highway from the field to the homestead stretched out like a giant snake, hidden, in patches, by undulating slopes of green and yellow.

In the meadow grasshoppers sang drowsily.

From the river hard by the shrill piping of frogs broke in upon the quiet serenity of the scene.

Along the way the eglanterre ran riot, overburdened with laughing bloom, filling the air with the perfume of simplicity and the sweet mysticism of the earth.

The dust lay thick upon the road.

Cat-birds mewed sadly in the haw trees.

Arriving upon the elevation in the road, the man halted and looked back.

He drew a long, deep breath, which was more like the heaving of a sigh, and mopped his face with a cotton kerchief, smutty and soiled with travel.

"Home!" exclaimed the man aloud.

The faint sound of a bell came to him.

He started and looked around.

The sun had set behind Lasalle.

Before him lay another valley; and on the summit of the wide plateau beyond, lay, in a low and shapeless pile, the homestead of the Rodrays, who were his people.

The trees about the place were black and stark; the fields near the house laid waste.

Spirals of smoke floated upwards from the smouldering heap.

The man swayed like a sapling, his hand clutching his throat.

And this was home!

Nothing stirred.

No human being was there.

His head swam; and his ears sang with a multitude of sounds.

And now he leaned upon a charred and broken picket by the roadside, and wept galling tears.

And when, with a last flicker of hope, he raised his eyes again, fearful lest she might not come, he saw Elaine moving towards him in the distance.

She was clad in simple garments of white; and by her side was a little one, who seemed to be making great haste.

And at sight of these who loved him, his soul felt the pulse of fortitude for coming struggles; and in his heart burst forth an old, wild song, an exultant echo of a past that was not dead.

Over the landscape stole the hush of coming twilight, and far to the west, where the blue hills raised their spurs into shifting banks of fleece, a great flare of fire and copper told where the sun had been and gave promise of a golden morrow.

They were nearer now, hurrying towards him, hand in hand, their lips parted for the glad welcome.

He went forward, in a glimmering haze of tears, to meet them whose love was great.

THE END.

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]



